

business or vote against them because of labor. This isn't a business-labor issue. This is an American issue. It is an issue that is extremely important if we are to sustain our status in the world. We have to make sure that we have trade deals that are fair. It is not about being protectionist. It is about the rules of trade. That is what it is about, the rules of trade. And I think it is extremely important that the majority party and the minority party and the rank and file Members who are dealing with this issue look at it in a comprehensive manner.

We have to do several things, as I mentioned earlier, and there is a lot we can do next week and the week after without any trade deal. The currency manipulation, there is legislation dealing with that. There is legislation in dealing with the value-added tax. If those people who are very interested in trade, the so-called free traders, we can pass these pieces of legislation this month to say, yes, we are serious about trade, and here is a start. Then we can start looking at some of these trade deals that have been negotiated, the Peru and Panama trade deal, what has happened with Korea, and see whether or not we should enact those. But we have to start, and we have to start today.

We are a new Congress, a Congress to which the American people said that we want a new direction in this country. And we have to give them the new direction that they want, because I can guarantee you, in this upcoming election cycle, if we do not make changes in how we deal with the trade issues, we will be on a slippery slope. I don't want that to happen.

I think the American people deserve better. The American people deserve better, and the business community in this country deserves better. Hopefully we will be able to give them that.

Once again I want to close by thanking you very much, Congressman HARE, for your strong leadership, and you, Congresswoman SUTTON, both in the freshman class. You're a breath of fresh air here in this Congress. I look forward to working with you as we move forward in this debate.

THE SUBURBAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. BERKLEY). 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. Madam Speaker, as we begin the work of this Congress, we should follow several key principles. Our first principle, which should be the main work of this House, should be focused on key major issues before the country; the second principle is that we should be effective and enact solutions for the American people; and the third is that we should use this debate to build consensus to deploy bipartisan action on behalf of our country.

One commentator looking at the record of the current Congress said that we are packing two days of debate into a four-day workweek. When you look at the record of this Congress so far, you can see that we have taken action on 13 bills to name a Federal building or post office or to build a road, we have enacted five bills to extend preexisting laws that were already on the books or passed last year, and we have passed eight bills cosponsored by a large number of Republicans or passed entirely without opposition. It is not an impressive record of work so far. And when you look at the actions of this Congress, you can see many pieces of legislation on which there has been no action in this Congress, despite a great need by the American people.

One of the key pieces of legislation that passed in the 109th Congress was the Deleting Online Predators Act. This is a bill which would protect children from online predators, especially those who use social networking sites like MySpace.com, the number one website on the planet, where the Center For National Missing and Exploited Children reports that at any one time there are 50,000 sexual predators online trying to get the attention of children.

This legislation, the Deleting Online Predators Act, passed the House of Representatives last year by a vote of 410-15. It stalled in the Senate, and as of yet in this Congress there has been no action whatsoever.

In the last Congress, we also passed the Student and Teacher Safety Act. The Student and Teacher Safety Act was endorsed by the National Education Association and would say that for any registered full-time teacher in America, that they have complete discretion to search a book bag or a locker to make sure that the classroom was gun-free. As a former teacher myself and as someone who has worked with many teachers, I think it is appropriate for the Congress to use a teacher's full-time professional judgment to make sure that their classroom, their workplace, was a safe place to be, not just for teachers, but especially for children.

When we have seen attacks in places like Winnetka, Illinois, or Columbine, or even Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia, we can see that there is a need to fully empower teachers with the right to search to make sure that their facilities are safe. The Student and Teacher Safety Act passed the House unanimously in the last Congress, was delayed in the United States Senate, and no action has been taken this year.

The Congress in the last term also passed the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Act. We have seen throughout America, especially in suburban communities, rapidly disappearing green and open space. It is very important for us to defend the National Park System. In fact, I think the country should set a long-term goal of doubling the size of the Na-

tional Park System. But we also want to make sure that we preserve green and open space close to where Americans live, in the suburbs.

This act would establish new and local grant programs to help protect suburban open space. Without action by the Congress, in 20 years time, many of the areas where we currently see green and open space could be an unending series of strip malls, removing an ambience, hurting our environment and delaying our ability to take effective action on global climate change. This legislation passed unanimously in the last Congress, but this Congress has failed to take any action on it.

One of the critical issues before this Congress is whether to pay Members of Congress who have been convicted of a felony and who have lost all of their appeals and beyond the shadow of a doubt stand condemned before the American people, and yet still collect a pension for their service in the Congress.

We have seen Members of Congress, like Dan Rostenkowski or Bob Ney or Duke Cunningham or James Traficant, all completely convicted by a jury of their peers beyond the shadow of a doubt, Members of Congress who lost or did not exercise any of their appeals, who are currently or have served in jail, and yet today or in months past have collected their congressional pensions from the jailhouse ATM.

In 1996, the Congress passed comprehensive reforms to kill the pension for any Member of Congress convicted of any one of 21 separate public integrity felonies. It was a bipartisan victory, with the full support of Speaker HASTERT and Speaker PELOSI. This legislation, once again, was delayed and killed in the United States Senate.

Today we have seen Members like Congressman JEFFERSON from Louisiana, indicted on 16 felony counts, and, but for this legislation, would have a right as a nine term Member of Congress, if convicted and if losing all of their appeals, to collect a \$50,000 a year pension, even if convicted for betraying the very taxpayers that pay that pension.

□ 2100

The Congress in February passed very limited pension reform legislation which wouldn't kill the pension for a Member of Congress on conviction of 21 felonies, but instead would only kill that pension for conviction of any one of four felonies. And basic felonies like wire fraud and income tax invasion would still allow the payment of a congressional pension.

Despite limited action by the Congress in January both in the House and Senate, legislation to kill the pension of a Member of Congress convicted of a felony has been completely stalled, completely stalled in February, in March, in April, in May, and now in the first weeks of June with no action and potential actions against other Members of Congress convicted of a felony.

In my view, the hundreds of thousands of dollars paid each year to Members of Congress convicted of a felony are a travesty and should be stopped by the elected representatives of the American people to defend the taxpayer.

All of this details the lack of a substantive agenda by this Congress which should be put before the American people working on issues that they care about, on key challenges before their families. As I have outlined, beyond naming some Post Offices, designating some roads, and passing legislation on which there is little to no debate, this Congress has not done much yet and right now is falling beneath its potential as a great deliberative body of one of the world's premier democracies.

What I would like to do tonight is lay out a new agenda, an agenda that would be meaningful to many Americans and taking on key problems before them.

This action was proffered before in the enactment of the suburban agenda last year which took action on a number of key items like the School Safety Acquiring Faculty Excellence Act authored by the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. PORTER). That bill basically took up the issue of Jessica Lunsford who was killed by someone employed by a school who had never had a background check. Despite his clear and demonstrable criminal record, this man was allowed to be in close contact with children leading to a tragic result.

The School Safety Acquiring Faculty Excellence Act passed the Congress and allowed every school in the country access to national criminal databases in order to ensure that every activity was taken to make sure that people who are put in close contact with children did not represent a clear and present danger to their safety.

The Congress also took on the issue of open space by passing the Charitable Donations For Open Space Act. This improved the treatment of conservation easements and other open space donations critical to preserving green and open space in the suburbs.

We also looked at the issue of helping families with expanding college costs by expanding permanently the charter of so-called 529 college savings account.

In my home State of Illinois, these are called "bright start accounts." And by permanently extending these tax deferred savings plans, we helped Americans with their college savings.

With those pieces of legislation, and the ones I talked about earlier which passed the House in an overwhelming bipartisan fashion but were killed in the Senate, we laid out a work plan for the Congress strongly supported by the American people with overwhelming bipartisan support on the Republican and Democratic side.

But as I detailed, key pieces of legislation remain to be enacted like the Deleting Online Predators Act, like the Two Student and Teacher Safety Act, like the Open Space and Farmland

Preservation Act. Persistence is a value strongly rewarded in the United States Congress, and following on that value, we have laid out a new suburban agenda for this year. The suburban agenda outlines a number of key pieces of legislation that directly meets the needs of American people in bipartisan ways to make sure that we are working on the key issues of the day and move the ball effectively, building bipartisan consensus.

Key items on the suburban agenda include the Gang Elimination Act by Representative REICHERT, which looks at a key problem in the United States which is of internationally connected drug gangs representing major franchises in criminal activity, moving to the suburbs, potentially overwhelming suburban law enforcement communities. While large cities like New York or Chicago have large gang intelligence units and years of experience in dealing with international drug gangs, drug gangs that are now moving to the suburbs can quickly overwhelm a small police force like the one in Waukegan, Illinois, that is facing a criminal empire that comprises thousands of potential gang members, and links to a number of countries.

The Gang Elimination Act calls for the Justice Department to identify the top three national drug gangs and lay out a 4-year strategy for taking those drug gangs down. This is something entirely appropriate, to lay out a mandate for whoever is our next President of the United States to make sure that we remove this threat to the American people.

If you added up all of the documented gang members who are in the United States, it would total the size of the seventh largest army on the planet. The average gang shooter in my State of Illinois is in the 7th grade, and this is a threat that the Federal Government in Washington can help law enforcement deal with.

A second piece of the suburban agenda is the 401 Kids Family Savings Account Act by the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT). We look at key figures like 70 percent of Americans fear it will be more difficult for their children to remain in the middle class than it was for them. You have to simply ask the question: How likely or how easy will it be for your children to afford the very house that they are being raised in?

Access to college in our view is a critical step to making sure that your children have a chance to be full and successful members of the middle class. When we have seen universities like George Washington University now totaling \$50,000 a year for tuition, we can see a substantial roadblock in the way of the future success of one's son or daughter.

The 401 Kids Family Savings Account, and previous legislation modeled after it, would allow every American to build success upon success. One of the best things that the Congress

has done is to allow every American working with the opportunity to establish a 401(k) retirement program to build tax deferred savings for their families.

Tens of millions of Americans have now established those 401(k) programs, and we would like every American to have a chance, an opportunity, to establish a 401 kids account for their new son or daughter, from the first day they are born, tax deferred savings for college, for the first-time purchase of a home or for starting a new business.

This would not only help boost the savings of the United States, but it would be a dramatic way to upgrade the financial education of American children because these 401 kids account statements would come into parents and allow each one of them to sit down with their son or daughter and see how a disciplined pattern of savings and investment could build a lifetime of good habits for that child.

One of the other pieces of legislation is the Health Insurance For Life Act by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT). The Health Insurance For Life Act would basically look at a key problem in today's America which is that the average American family, especially in the suburbs, will have seven jobs over their lifetime, and we still have thousands of Americans exercising their COBRA rights to continue their health care coverage. Under Federal law if you have been covered by an employer-provided health care plan, if you lose your job, you can still continue health care and insurance for your family for at least 18 months at your own expense. But many Americans hit the end of that 18-month limit and they will not be allowed to have a safe place to cover their family without extension of these rights.

The Health Insurance Portability Act, otherwise known as the Health Insurance For Life Act of 2007, would allow families at their own cost to continue their health care insurance so there is always in a seven-job career a safe place for their family to be covered. And there would always be an option to maintain that coverage.

As I mentioned before, one of the key parts of our agenda is the Deleting Online Predators Act because throughout America we have not seen a reduction in people who would seek to use the new and powerful tools of the web and the Internet, and especially social networking sites, to reach out and attack children. It is already common knowledge through the culture, and especially through shows like Dateline NBC, that we have seen repeat offenders, even on the same network news show.

The suburban agenda also includes other key items. The one at the bottom is very important for the mid-21st century, and that is the Senior Safety For Dignity Act. The Senior Safety For Dignity Act updates a set of bill of rights for Americans who need nursing home care to ensure that they maintain their dignity. This is legislation

put forward by Mrs. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida.

The Senior Safety For Dignity Act is very important because in our country the baby boom is aging. The first baby boomer collects a retirement check in 2009. The number of retirees in America will go from 35 million to almost 90 million, and the need for nursing home care in our country will grow. We need to upgrade the bill of rights for Americans in nursing homes because of the large expansion in capability that we will need in our country and to make sure that the quality of care is maintained.

One of the experts in this Congress is my colleague, a physician and a Member from Georgia, Dr. PRICE, who can comment on a number of these key issues.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. It really is a privilege for me to come to the floor tonight and work with you, Mr. KIRK, for a few moments and to explain to our colleagues here in the House and to the Speaker about the suburban agenda, a very important area. I appreciate your leadership in this area. You have been steadfast in making certain that these issues, and they may not be top-tier issues, they may not be headlines in all of our newspapers, but your district, like my district, I have a suburban district outside of Atlanta, and folks there are concerned about what folks all across this Nation are concerned about.

Mr. KIRK. We have seen consistently that while events in Iran or Iraq, while issues concerning global climate change, and of course the immigration bill in the Senate are all front-burner issues, but for American families, education, health care, protecting the environment and saving for college are important issues.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. That really is true. When I talk with groups at home, and once we get past the hot button, the headline issues of Iraq and immigration and the like, people are concerned about education for their kids and they are concerned about health care for themselves and their parents. They are concerned about security and quality of life issues in their community to make certain that there is going to be green space and there are places where can take their kids.

I was sitting in my office and I had to come down and join you. These are not Republican issues or Democrat issues, these are American issues.

□ 2115

They're issues that I think all of the House can rally around. And you mentioned the health care issue, and as a physician, I understand as well as anybody I suspect about the importance of being able to provide health insurance for families.

We live in a world now where jobs aren't constant. It used to be that your dad and my dad and other folks, they'd get a job and they'd be with that same company 25, 30, 35 years, and they'd get

a gold watch and they'd move on and they'd take that health care with them. Now, that's not the case. Our children will have 7, 8, 9, 10 different jobs, 10 different employers and oftentimes having themselves as being self-employed.

Mr. KIRK. One solution would be to have the government take over everyone's health care and to make sure we take action that breaks the link between you and your physician and insert a large bureaucracy that currently runs the post office and now put it in charge of your health care.

Many of us think that that may not be the way to go. The way to go is to make sure that for many Americans, they like the health insurance plan that they're on, and then they would like to carry that through the five to seven jobs that they will have in the 21st century.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Exactly. And that hits the nail right on the head. People want to know that their health care is going to be consistent and they have the ability, along with their physicians, to make health care decisions, which is why the Health Insurance Portability Act that Congressman DENT is reintroducing is so important.

It makes it so, as I understand, that if an individual changes jobs, that they're able to provide that COBRA insurance for as long as needed. So it makes it so they can continue that COBRA insurance for a much longer period of time, to tide them over until they're with another employer or they can be able to provide for individual insurance on their own.

It's not the be-all-and-end-all, but it is a particularly important piece of the puzzle that makes it so that people can maintain their own health insurance, and I know that you agree with that.

Mr. KIRK. The need here is to remove the fear that somehow a loss of a job or discovery of a preexisting condition will deny Americans and their families health care insurance. What we want to make sure is you already have a right under Federal law to extend your health care insurance for 18 months. Now, we're not talking about extending it indefinitely, because when an American reaches age 65, you're going to be covered by Medicare, and if you fall below the poverty line, you're going to be covered by Medicaid.

But for large numbers of people, especially looking at an unsure job market, we want to have them assured by this piece of legislation that there's always a safe place for their family to be covered.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Exactly, and that gets to the number of uninsured that we have in this Nation. There are 45, 46, 47 million individuals who at some point during this calendar year will be without health insurance. Those aren't the folks that are on Medicaid. Those aren't the folks that are on Medicare. Those are the folks that are between jobs oftentimes, who are unable to continue the COBRA insur-

ance that they ought to be able to, and this is what this bill would do. It would really, really solve one of the major problems that we have with working Americans who do indeed want to provide health insurance for families.

So I commend you for your leadership on this issue and so many others.

The Senior Safety Indignity Act is extremely important. I served in the State legislature, as I know many folks in this chamber did, and every single year we would hear horror stories about problems of health care workers in the nursing home or extended care facility arena.

And in Georgia what we tried to do was a similar kind of thing to make certain that background checks were available, and this would provide that kind of security and that kind of important information for individuals in the senior centers so that we know that the folks who were going to be assisting seniors and caring for seniors have the appropriate skills and the appropriate background in order to do that.

Mr. KIRK. The gentleman is one of the most respected physicians here in the Congress. The difficulty before this country is that the baby boom began when the troops came home in 1945. So, for an American born in that key year, you're going to be collecting a retirement check in 2009 when you hit your 65th birthday. There are so many Americans that then enter the retirement cohort and that may need nursing home care. That is the critical reason why this Congress may have to work on fewer bills naming post offices and designating roads and more on making sure that we maintain quality senior care as the baby boom generation retires.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I appreciate that, and the point that you're making is so vital for all of us in this chamber to appreciate, and that is, that we've now been in session 5½ months, and we've passed and sent to the President about 28 to 30 pieces of legislation. Almost the majority of those are naming a building or naming a post office or renaming a building or renaming a post office.

And these issues here, if you look down the list of those seven issues, from the gang elimination to teacher and student safety, to other education issues with 401 Kids Family Savings Act or the Health Insurance Act that we talked about, the Deleting Online Predators Act, open space, Senior Safety Act, these are the issues that are of vital importance to the American people all across this Nation. These are issues that, frankly, ought to get the vast majority of Members of this chamber on both sides of the aisle's support so that we could move forward with real legislation for real people.

Mr. KIRK. I take the gentleman's point. When you look at our legislative work, in 5½ months, in such promise with the new Congress, what we've done, these are all great Americans

who should be honored, but these actions should not be the sum total of what the Congress has done.

We've named the Gale McGee Post Office; the Rush Hudson Limbaugh, Sr., Post Office; Scipio Jones Post Office; the Lane Evans, one of my colleagues from Illinois, Post Office. All good Americans that should be honored, but this should not be the sum total of the work of the Congress.

The country witnessed a tragedy in Blacksburg, Virginia, with the attack on Virginia Tech. A number of experienced educators saw some warning signs, as we saw before at Columbine High School, as we saw before in the Winnetka school system when Laurie Dann attacked it.

The Student and Teacher Safety Act is common-sense legislation that this Congress should take up. It says to any full-time teacher, you know the warning signs, you know your children that are in the classrooms, and we want to make sure that you don't have to fear a trial lawyer and you don't have to get a warrant. If you suspect that a threat to your classroom, to your kids has come into a locker or in through a bookbag, and now the classroom is a dangerous place, you have complete authority to remove that danger.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. And you're right. The incident at Virginia Tech was so astounding and so horrific for all of us to witness, and our hearts and our prayers still go out to those families.

But I understand, as I know you do, that there were individuals who were reticent to bring that out into the open before it happened, bring that individual who apparently committed that awful, awful tragedy out into the open for fear of potential liability.

That's no way for a Nation to live. That's no way for a responsible people to have to operate, to have to think in the back of their mind, well, can I do what's right or do I have to worry about an attorney, do I have to worry about a lawsuit.

This is the kind of legislation that we, as a Congress, if we adopted these seven items, I suspect that the American people would say this is a Congress that has acted appropriately, and we would all be able to stand proud and with that poster and present it to our constituents and say this is a responsible agenda for the American people.

My concern right now over the next three weeks, as you well know, we're entering appropriations time. It is very likely that none of these things, none of them, will be even brought to the floor during this period of time and that we'll get bound up in the process of spending hard-earned taxpayer money, trying to be responsible in that endeavor. But these issues that are supported by 60, 70, 80 percent of the American people, we ought to be able to take those off the table right away.

Mr. KIRK. I'm worried, too. The gentleman can talk about Atlanta. In Chicago, in the Chicagoland area, we are

now seeing a great expansion of large national gang franchises like the Latin Kings, like the Gangster Disciples, et cetera, moving into the suburbs. A suburban police department has far fewer resources than a big city like Chicago and Atlanta to fight these, and so that's where the Federal Government can come in.

We're particularly concerned about a gang that some Americans have heard about called Mara Salvatrucha, MS-13, which seems to be particularly violent and one in which there are tantalizing clues that there may have been discussions with terrorist organizations with links overseas because the leaders of MS-13 don't have obviously any patriotic feeling toward the United States, and if they could link up to a terrorist organization for money, they would.

In the city of Chicago, we have now seen these gangs moving into places like Waukegan or Aurora or Joliet. I don't know about Atlanta, but it seems like particularly appropriate when you see that the average gang shooter for these international drug gangs is in the 7th grade.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. We have similar experiences in the city of Atlanta and then in the surrounding area. I don't represent any of the city of Atlanta itself. My district abuts the city of Atlanta, but I have small cities, some as small as 8- to 12,000 residents. I have some as large as 80- to 100,000, and then some unincorporated county areas.

But the resources that they have with which to fight gangs aren't the kind of resources that large metropolitan cities have, large urban areas have, and this bill, introduced by Representative Dave Weichert who himself is a hero in the law enforcement arena, having been the sheriff out in Washington State.

Mr. KIRK. With the Green River killer.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Apprehended the Green River killer, and such a hero he is, and we ought to as a House of Representatives and as a Nation recognize that this Act, this would allow police departments and law enforcement officials all across this Nation to know that there are resources being brought to bear to identify, like MS-13, to identify those gangs that are the greatest threat to our communities, the greatest threat to our constituents all across this Nation, that there is a unified strategy that is going to be brought to bear in order to make it so that we prevail in this war.

Mr. KIRK. I'm particularly worried because in the recent failed Senate immigration bill there was an amendment put forward to deny documented members of international drug gangs the chance to enter the pathway to citizenship that the legislation proposed. That amendment failed.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. This immigration bill that was just in the Senate last week, many of us had great concerns over, but are you telling me that

there was a portion of the bill that it would allow gang members who had been convicted of a felony, that if they were found to be illegal, that they couldn't be deported; is that what you are saying?

Mr. KIRK. The proposed amendment would have denied any documented member of an international drug gang from the chance to apply for the pathway to citizenship that it proposed, and that amendment was defeated 51-46.

When we came together and proposed the Gang Elimination Act, we at least looked at the several hundred thousand documented gang members in the United States and said how do we deal with this problem.

Sometimes I have to have the concern that this Congress may take action in which that number would increase, making the problem even worse by action of the Federal Government. That's why I think refocusing our work for actions beyond naming of post offices to looking at how small suburban communities are being overwhelmed by large gangs with international links, some of whom may add to members if the wrong legislation should pass the Congress, that is an issue that should be squarely put before this Congress.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I couldn't agree more, and there was such great promise for this new Congress, this new majority, not of which we're a part of, but this new majority that was swept in and began in January and all sorts of wonderful promises about great legislation and being responsive to the concerns of Americans all across the Nation. And what we've had is a legislative agenda that hasn't done that.

And so you and I stand here tonight inviting our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to embrace this suburban agenda, embrace an agenda that 70, 80 percent of the American people would support with common-sense pieces of legislation that address security, that address health care, that address education, that address caring for our seniors, that address green space. It just astounds me that we can't get that kind of support on both sides.

□ 2130

Mr. KIRK. It's okay to criticize, if we find that in 5½ months we haven't done as much as we had hoped. But Americans, I think, at our core, look for solutions. This Congress has 18 months to go. So it's not enough just to criticize. You then have to put forward a positive agenda of not only saying we haven't done enough, and maybe we should not just consider 13 bills to name Federal property and 5 bills to extend preexisting law, but work at these problems. Then the question is, what is your agenda?

To date, I haven't seen a comprehensive agenda for the other side. I know that a vast majority of Republicans and Democrats will join on this agenda. When we look, we have a critical problem with online predators, at any

one time, 50,000 online predators contacting kids. There are hundreds of contacts in each month, in my own congressional district.

Now, people like Julie Wachtheim, the President of Wheeling High School, who, minutes after putting her class photo on a new MySpace page was contacted by a sexual predator using an advanced search engine that obviously showed us that he was contacting not just her, but hundreds of other young girls, in an attempt to find someone. I am not sure if that is the case in the Atlanta suburbs as well, but I think this is beginning to be a real threat to Americans. This was not part of our growing up.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. No, absolutely.

Mr. KIRK. The Internet was largely invented in 1996 after you and I had both completed college. But this is part of our children's growing up. I think this calls for congressional action.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I appreciate that. It's not that the Internet is bad, it's just that this is a different world, and the Internet is now like Main Street of 20 or 30 years ago, where you would have to be wary of strangers, and our parents told us about strangers on Main Street and how to deal with them. It's much more difficult when those strangers are able to come literally into your own home and entice young people who may not have their guard up as much.

We have story after story, time after time you will hear law enforcement officers talk about the challenges that they have in even getting young people to admit that, in fact, they have been susceptible or been approached by this kind of behavior. But it is rampant out there. It's absolutely rampant. There is not any reason that we ought not to be able to pass some commonsense legislation like the Deleting Online Predators Act like you have introduced in this House of Representatives, which is something that ought to be supported by 70, 80, 90 percent of our colleagues here, something that ought to go, frankly, in front of the appropriations battles we are about to wage over the next 3 to 6 weeks as we work as diligently as we can to responsibly spend hard-earned taxpayer money. But this is something that we ought to be able to coalesce behind.

Mr. KIRK. I don't know of a single community in my district that hasn't been touched by this tragedy yet.

What we are talking about is laying out a new set of rules of the road in the 21st century to protect children, like advising parents through the Federal Communications Commission, Federal Trade Commission, that growing up in America today means having the computer in the living room rather than the child's bedroom, with a casual look and walk-bys by the parent so you can see who is trying to contact your kids.

Like one Pennsylvania mother said, in the 21st century I have a complete right to all of my children's passwords

to make sure that I know who is trying to contact my young, minor child, and then to make sure that there are protections at school and in libraries. In my district, we have found some predators who are using library computers, school staff that were using library computers to contact kids, to make sure that our schools do not enable virtual hunting grounds to find kids. All of this is exactly what the Congress should work on, a new technology, which has an unintended effect of creating a new danger, and then Congress stepping in to make sure that danger is removed. We are not working on that right now.

With the eight bills cosponsored by Republicans or passed without opposition, five extending preexisting public law or order, and thirteen to name Federal property or to build a road, that action has not been taken. Action has not also been taken to kill the pension for a Member of Congress convicted of a felony.

We have just seen one of our colleagues indicted for 16 felonies. We have seen some of our colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, convicted, and yet they are paid their pension by the very taxpayers they have betrayed.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. That's the kind of perpetuation of business as usual here in Washington, that the folks at home just say what on earth are you doing when an individual can be convicted of a felony, and continue to get their pension, they just shake their head. They throw their hands up in the air, and they say, what are you doing? Why can't you do something responsible, which is why this positive agenda, suburban agenda, which is all things again that the vast majority of Members of this House ought to be supporting, which is why we ought to be pushing that forward.

I, for the life of me, I can't answer why we ought not to be able to deal with these things before we launch into the battles over the appropriations bills.

Do you have any sense as to why the majority party won't allow these kinds of bills to come to the floor?

Mr. KIRK. I just worry. Right now, the Congress took very limited action to kill the pensions for Members of Congress back on January 23, but then see stalled action. We have taken no action on ethics reform, killing pensions for Members of Congress convicted of felonies in February, no action in March, no action in April, no action in May, no action now for the first few weeks of June.

You worry because senior Members of Congress have the largest pensions, and they are in charge of this place. Why is it that we are delaying action on this critical reform?

I always thought that the most important thing about such a reform is to prevent crime. You know, if you kill the pension for a Member of Congress convicted of a felony, you almost turn their family members, their spouses,

into adjuncts of the Ethics Committee, because they are worried about their future retirement income. That's as it should be, keeping everyone on the straight and narrow.

The State of Illinois is not seen as the cleanest State in the Union. Yet even under our State law, we kill the pension for public officials convicted of a felony, like even Governor Ryan, who just lost his appeal to do that.

I worry, though, that we haven't taken any of these actions. We have stalled actions on all of these items, with an overwhelming number of Republicans, Democrats and independents, wanting action on health care and making sure that we can afford college, and so far this Congress has fallen short of its potential.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Not only fallen short, but I would suggest to my good friend from Illinois that the majority party has seemed to raise hiding and decreasing transparency and accountability in a very important area to a huge degree, and that is the area of earmarks, the area of special projects, pork projects, special projects for Members.

What we have just learned in the past week or so is that the Appropriations chair has said well, we won't be debating any of these earmarks, these special projects on the floor of the House. We won't be debating them. What we will do is parachute them in, air drop them in a conference committee so that there can be no light, no sunshine on these earmarks.

That's the kind of priority that concerns me about this majority party, that they have a priority for decreasing transparency and decreasing accountability for spending, but they also, by the same token, will not address the concerns of the vast majority of Americans all across our Nation.

In the area of security, in the area of education, in the area of health care, in the area of senior security, in the area of green space in our communities, a wonderful, positive agenda that we have put before this Congress and, in fact, it's getting no visibility here on floor of the House.

Mr. KIRK. I am just worried, too, because we have now talked about how George Washington University is talking about \$50,000 for 1-year of tuition, the first university in the country to break that mark. So you look at a 4-year bachelor's degree at \$200,000, post tax, far beyond the ability of a middle-class family to reach that level.

So what should the Congress do? Should we have the government take over all college education? Should the government control prices? Should we have more controls from the House of Representatives so that those who run every other government bureaucracies now run every education institution in the country? I would say no. I would say that we have had too many shortages and too much waste if a bureaucracy can take control of a college.

On the other hand, could we all join together to increase savings and investment for each American family to build success upon success, the 401(k) program, by authorizing each American family the day that your son or daughter is born to establish a 401 kids tax-deferred savings account.

When we look at how this Congress can sometimes change culture, we have seen that 401(k), an obscure section of the IRS code, has now become part of the lexicon off our country because of how successful it is.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Exactly.

Mr. KIRK. We had a time, probably, when there was a good cigar salesman out there that made it de rigeur that every young father would buy cigars for everyone when they had a new child. That is probably part of the 20th century and not part of the 21st century.

So what is it that we can do that becomes part of the cultural experience of every American when their son or daughter is born? One of the things we can do is pass this bill so that every dad on their way home, or mom, if she is so inclined, can stop by some sort of financial institution or a savings and loan or a credit union, and establish a 401Kids account for their son or daughter.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Wouldn't that be wonderful. What a grand legacy. The bill you are referring to is H.R. 87, primary sponsorship by JUDY BIGGERT. It's something that's near and dear to our hearts in Georgia. As you may recall, Senator Paul Coverdale, the late Paul Coverdale, served in the United States Senate. One of his goals was to make certain that there was an ability by all families to be able to afford a college education for their children. He fought as hard as he could during his tenure in the United States Senate to make certain that happened.

This is an extension of that. This is a wonderful, would provide a wonderful opportunity for families to put aside a little money in a tax-free mechanism to be able to cover college education for their children.

Mr. KIRK. In the State of Illinois, under section 529, which is a charter that allows States to set up college savings program, we call them Bright Start accounts. What does Georgia call its college saving program?

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. We have the HOPE Scholarship savings plan in Georgia, which is remarkably successful. But there is no reason we ought not extend it because what we provide in Georgia is you can't use that money out of state.

Mr. KIRK. Right. So the problem we have now is that we have not fully taken advantage of the successes that we have already put in place, that Congress lets each State establish a college charter savings plan like HOPE Scholarship in Georgia or Bright Start in Illinois. But these, each State program, has restrictions and the inability to transfer freely throughout the country.

One of the great things about the 401(k) program is that it allows, not only, for Americans to transfer their accounts between employers, but no difficulty to transfer between States. Should not we give that opportunity to each young son or daughter in America so that we can save and invest for college?

We know, already, with \$70 billion invested in HOPE scholarships or in Bright Start accounts throughout the country, that this has been a great success. How much more of a success will we have if we simply gave the full national charter to 401Kids accounts. I come out of a military background, if you are transferred, or you are part of a large organization, you may live in several States and have the ability to fully transfer these amounts in a national program, bottom line, to make sure that there is much more money available for your son or daughter to be in college.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Absolutely. What a great template to use. What a wonderful model with the 401(k) program, which is familiar to millions, tens of millions, if not over 100 million Americans, who have some type of 401(k) program. They understand how simple it is, how easy it is, how almost painless it is to be able to plan for the future to put that money aside, and to have a vehicle that models itself off of that, after that, as the 401Kids program would do, to allow moms and dads all across this Nation to be able to put a little money aside on a regular basis. When Junior grows up, they will recognize at the age of 15 or 16 that he or she indeed will be able to have the ability to go to the college of his or her choice and realize their his or her potential and their dreams.

Mr. KIRK. We have now seen also with the 401(k) program a change in how Americans look at the economy for the future. There was a time in which most Americans owned no stock and saw the New York Stock Exchange or the other exchanges as something far away, not part of their lives, and maybe for rich people only.

The 401(k) program changed all of that.

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And so now we have tens of millions of Americans who are investors, and changing that one cultural attribute that we maybe shouldn't have, which is looking too much for the short term, and helping the whole country change into a new investor mentality, to invest for the long haul, to look at high technology and other investments to see that savings can be built up in a far more substantial way, beyond just a savings account at a bank if they can be put into long term stocks and bonds.

These are habits that have been built for adults, but have not been inculcated in children; that if we start 401 kids accounts with your son or daughter's name on that account, that as your child gets to be 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

years old, it gives an education opportunity to say to your daughter, look at what we've done in just the last year and how much this has gone up, hoping that this will set an example for the rest of her life, making sure that she has successful habits to save and invest for the future.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. What a wonderful vision and what a wonderful dream. We've all heard the stories of the entrepreneur individual with a significant amount of resources who went into a community and said to a high school or a middle school class that normally wouldn't necessarily have the resources to go to college, any of you that complete your high school education in a way that would allow you to enter a college, I'll fund that college education. This would transfer that, and those kids then do extremely well, so much better than their peers in other classes who haven't been given that assurance.

This is the kind of program that would give that assurance to every young child all across this Nation, to allow their parents to be able to put aside a little bit of money, a little resources over the lifetime of their child so that they can then afford the college education and open the dreams for each and every child.

Mr. KIRK. Just to sum up the key principles that I think we should follow, this Congress, this House should work on the major issues before the American people and especially their families, Number 1.

Number 2, we should take effective action that enacts solutions to problems that American families face.

And Number 3, that we should work to build consensus to sustain bipartisan action. We should not operate this House in a way that, as one person said, packs 2 days of debate into a 4-day work week; that this House can do much more than name Post Offices or designate roads; that we are here not just criticizing, we're laying out an agenda that, based on the last Congress, we know an overwhelming number of Democrats and Republicans will join, like the Deleting On-Line Predators Act that passed 410-15; like the Student and Teacher Safety Act endorsed by the National Education Association that passed unanimously; like the Open Space and Farm Land Preservation Act that also passed unanimously.

If we can join together on these items, key pieces of legislation, already bipartisan cosponsors laid out, I think we would help this Congress reach more of the potential than currently in 5 months of work it's failed to do.

But to conclude, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I know that our time is short, but I just want to commend you once again for your leadership in this area. These are issues that concern all Americans, issues of education, issues of safety,

issues of security, issues of health care, and they are issues that the vast majority of us ought to support.

So I challenge our friends on both sides of the aisle to step forward and support a positive agenda for the American people. It's outlined right here.

I want to commend you for your leadership, and I appreciate the opportunity to join you tonight.

Mr. KIRK. I thank you. And I commend everyone, that if you'd like to learn more about the suburban agenda, you can go on to our website, www.house.gov/Kirk for an outline of the suburban agenda. This is not just an us-only agenda. This is an agenda that we hope will be matched from the other side. But refocusing our work on health care, on education, on environmental protection and on economic growth, so that this Congress can realize it's full potential far better than in the first 5 months of our activity.

HEALTH CARE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. BERKLEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Madam Speaker, I want to also thank and commend my friends for their discussion of the suburban agenda. I am coming to the floor tonight to talk about health care, and of course they've already covered a lot of those issues in their discussion that preceded in the past hour.

I want to talk about some concerns we have in the delivery of health care services throughout the country. The future of medical care in this country is going to be front and center over the next 18 months time. The elections of 2008 will be about a lot of things, but they will also be a lot about health care.

Three bills that I want to focus on this evening as well, H.R. 2583, H.R. 2584 and H.R. 2585. The first, H.R. 2583 deals with residency programs. The second, H.R. 2584 deals with loan forgiveness and tax abatements for medical students and newly minted doctors. And the third, H.R. 2585, deals with physicians in the Medicare program who are adversely affected by reimbursement reductions every year under a formula known as the sustainable growth rate formula.

Well, as we go through these next 18 months and deciding which avenue through which our health care system is going to go, we have two choices on the table. We've got a public sector, the government side, which already has about half of the responsibility for health care in this country. And we've got that which is comprised of the private sector, as well as that care which is just simply delivered without expectation of compensation, what used to be known as charitable care.

Under the option to expand the government's role, the government's side,

the government's sector involvement in the delivery of health care, typically that's known as universal health care. In the 1990s we called that "Hillary Care."

But could we also approach it from a standpoint of encouraging the private sector to stay involved and to improve their products and make them more flexible and user friendly in order to provide more for our health care dollar in this country.

My opinion, having worked in the system for well over 25 years, is the United States does have the best health care system in the world, and it is my obligation, my charge to help it remain the best health care system in the world.

Now, I know there's plenty of people in this body who would contest that statement. And there's plenty of issues around to call it into question.

My predecessor in this office, former Majority Leader Dick Armezy used to be fond of saying, you know, the numbers don't lie; but if you torture them long enough, they'll admit to almost anything.

But let's talk about some of the different principles that are guiding the debate about public versus private and the delivery of health care services. And maybe we ought to spend a little time talking about the background. How did we get into this? How'd we get to where we are today?

You almost have to go back over 60 years to go back to the time coming out of World War II when the United States, of course, was the victor; came out of the war with a flourishing economy.

But during the war, President Roosevelt, in an effort to keep down trouble from inflation, put into effect rather stringent wage and price controls across the country. The employers wanted to keep employees, so a lot of employees, of course, had been drafted and were serving overseas, so those employees that were left the employers wanted to keep them working. But they were constrained. They couldn't offer raises. They couldn't offer the money that would be required; they were worried that someone across town might outbid them.

Well, they went and came upon the idea of providing a health care benefit, and, in fact, the Supreme Court ruled that that was okay; that that did not violate the spirit or the intent of the law that Franklin Roosevelt had passed governing the wage and price controls. So during the war, the concept of employer-based insurance was begun.

The war ended. The United States was blessed with the postwar economic boom that started, and what began as a necessity born out of a wartime economy continued. It was extremely popular. Health care insurance provided by the employer turned out to be one of the most popular employee benefits that has ever been seen in this country. And up until the early 1980s it just worked wonderfully.

Contrast that, of course, with Europe. Even the parts the Europe that were victorious in the Second World War, the battles were fought in their back yard. Their economies were devastated. They needed to quickly stand up a health care system that would take care of a population that had been deprived by 5 years of war or longer. And these countries decided to promote the single payer system that you see that's so prevalent in Western Europe and in England today.

But that was born of necessity also, because, again, the country's economies were devastated or, in fact, they had not been victorious in the war, they had lost the war, but they needed to quickly stand up a system that would take care of their citizens.

We go from 1945 to 1965. Presidency of another Texan, Lyndon Baines Johnson. During that time, President Johnson enacted the Medicare statute, a little over 40 years ago. The Medicare and the Medicaid programs were signed into law during his administration. These were large government-run programs that were created to focus primarily on hospital and physician care for elderly and basic health care services for the people who were this poverty.

Decades later, almost 40 years later, it was evident that the government-run Medicare program, extremely slow to change, very difficult to change a large government program; and anything that that caused any change within the program was going to be incredibly expensive.

Already difficult to operate.

But in 2003, in fact, my first year to serve in this Congress, my first State of the Union message that I heard the President deliver in this House, he talked about how the need for, or the time for a Medicare prescription drug benefit had arrived; and this was too important an issue to be left to another President or another Congress. It was work that we were going to take on that year, 2003, and get that benefit delivered to the American people. And indeed we did.

We worked on that bill in various committees throughout the year 2003. Right at the end of the year we passed the bill. There was initially a prescription drug discount card that was available, but over the next 2 years the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services put together the plan that we now know as the Medicare Part-D plan. And in spite of all of the problems that it had getting started, arguably it is one of the better functioning government-run health care programs ever seen to date.

But the government needed to catch up to a private system that was already focused on prevention, timely treatment of disease and disease management. So finally Congress put the Medicare prescription drug plan, that focused on giving seniors access to needed medications forward, and the program has been successful and provided benefits for seniors. It's come