EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

INTRODUCTION OF THE BUILDING, RENOVATING, IMPROVING, AND CONSTRUCTING KIDS' SCHOOLS ACT OF 2000

HON. JUDY BIGGERT

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, the U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO] released reports in 1995 and 1996 outlining the deplorable conditions in many of our Nation's elementary and secondary schools. A sample GAO survey showed that America's schools are in need of an estimated $112 billion in repairs and that $11 billion alone is needed to get schools in compliance with Federal mandates requiring the elimination of hazards such as asbestos, lead in water and radon, and to improve accessibility for the disabled.

The decline in the condition of our Nation's schools is not limited to a particular region. Every State has schools that are in need of repair and modernization, and my home State of Illinois is no exception. Last August, the Illinois State Board of Education released the results of its own survey, which showed that over the next 5 years, Illinois' school districts will need more than $7 billion in infrastructure work.

Mr. Speaker, as a strong supporter of local education, I believe that school construction and renovation are areas best directed by States and local communities. That's why I applaud those States that have passed measures designed to help schools replace and modernize their facilities. Illinois is one of those States that have stepped up to the plate in this regard.

In December 1997, the Illinois General Assembly passed a school construction law to address the shortage of classroom space brought on by population growth and aging buildings. To fund the program, the General Assembly approved the sale of $1.1 billion in school construction bonds over a 5-year period. Just last year, Illinois Governor George H. Ryan's Illinois FIRST program increased funding for the school construction grant program by $1 billion, adding another $290 million for fiscal year 2000.

Despite the best efforts of Illinois and other States, the long-term costs of repairing and upgrading our Nation's schools are proving more than many State and local governments can bear. And in this era of budget surpluses, it would not be right for Congress to sit idly by and let schools fall into further disrepair and obsolescence.

That's why I rise today to introduce the Building, Renovating, Improving, and Constructing Kids' Schools (BRICKS) Act—legislation addressing our Nation's exploding need for elementary and secondary education school repair. This legislation is a slightly modified companion bill to S. 1992, which was introduced in the other chamber by my friend and colleague, Senator SNOWE of Maine.

Here is what the BRICKS Act does. First, it provides $20 billion in interest-free and low-interest Federal loans to support school construction and repair at the local level. These loans will be used to pay the interest owed by States and localities to bondholders on new school construction bonds that are issued through the year 2003. These loans will be interest-free for the first 5 years, with low interest rates to follow.

Second, the BRICKS Act allocates these school construction loans on an annual basis, using the title I distribution formula. Monies would be distributed to States at the request of each State's Governor and without a lengthy application process.

The money provided for under this bill is used to support, not supplant, local school construction efforts. These loans are designed to allow States and localities to issue bonds that would not otherwise be made due to financial limitations.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, these loans will be distributed in a fiscally responsible manner that does not take away from the Social Security program or the projected on-budget surpluses. Specifically, my bill will generate funding from the Exchange Stabilization Fund [ESF]—a fund that was created through the Gold Reserve Act of 1934 and that currently has more than $40 billion in assets.

Finally, the school construction and modernization loans are not a government handout. The BRICKS Act requires a State entity or local government that receives funding under this legislation to repay the loan to the Exchange Stabilization Fund. At the same time, this proposal ensures that States and local governments will not be burdened by excessive interest rates—or be forced to repay the loan in an unreasonable amount of time.

After the first five interest-free years, the interest rates on these loans will be set at the average prime lending rate for the year in which the bond is issued, but it cannot exceed 4.5 percent. Again, no payment will be owed, and no interest will accrue for 5 years, unless the Federal Government prior to that time meets its financial commitment to funding 40 percent of the costs borne by local school districts for providing special education services, as is currently required by Federal law.

Mr. Speaker, the BRICKS Act is a fiscally responsible answer to a serious national problem. I am proud to offer this legislation for the House's consideration. I am more pleased to note how this legislation will help schools located in the 13th Congressional District of Illinois, which I represent. As my colleagues may know, the 13th district encompasses some of the fastest growing communities in the nation.

School administrators in my district have made it known that school construction and renovation have failed to keep pace with the explosive population growth and increased rates of student enrollment. What's more, they tell me that the growth in tax revenues from new households has not kept up with the costs of construction needed to serve them. By providing schools and States with more fiscal flexibility and options, the BRICKS Act addresses this problem in my congressional district and in districts across the United States.

I urge my colleagues to support the BRICKS Act. This timely legislation makes responsible use of limited Federal resources and effectively meets a commitment to giving every child an opportunity to attend school in an environment that is physically safe and conducive to learning.

CHINA: THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE—REBIYA KADEER SENTENCED TO 8 YEARS IN JAIL

HON. JOHN EDWARD PORTER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to highlight on yet another incidence of the Chinese Government's blatant violation of human rights. 1999 was one of the worst years yet in recent Chinese history for arbitrary detentions, arrests, and human rights violations, and it is looking like 2000 will be no different.

This time the victim is a 53-year-old Uighur businesswoman, Rebiya Kadeer. On March 10, 2000, Ms. Kadeer was sentenced to 8 years in jail for ''giving information to separatists outside the country.''

Ms. Kadeer is a well respected businesswoman who was once officially touted as an inspiration to her fellow members of the Uighur ethnic group. Her efforts to business enterprises have been recognized by Chinese authorities as contributing to the overall economic and social development of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. So respected was she by the Beijing establishment that she was chosen in 1995 as part of China's official delegation to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

However, in 1997, Ms. Kadeer was stripped of her passport, and with it the right to freedom of movement as well as subjected to continual police harassments. These actions were clearly aimed at silencing her husband, Mr. Sidick Rozi, a former political prisoner who has been an outspoken critic of China's treatment of the Uighur minority in western China. Mr. Rozi, now living in the United States, has made numerous statements on Radio Free Asia, Voice of America and testified last July before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus concerning the extremely harsh discriminations suffered by the Uighur minority. Ms. Kadeer was made a hostage in her own country, unable to join her husband and a number of her children in the United States, simply because of the political activities of her husband.

On August 11, 1999 Rebiya Kadeer was arrested while she was on her way to meet with a group of Congressional Staff visiting China. She was charged in September with ''providing secret information to foreigners.'' Ms. Kadeer does not have access to ''state secrets'', she is a businesswoman, not a political

activist. After seven months of detention and the arrest and subsequent arbitrary sentencing of her secretary and one son, Ms. Kadeer was given a 4-hour trial. During this trial, neither she nor her lawyer were able to speak, none of her children were allowed to attend and the 300 Uighurs who had gathered at the courthouse were dispersed by Chinese police.

This was not a trial. It was a farce. If China wants to be a full partner in the international arena, it has to start abiding by international norms and living within the rule of law. Seven months of arbitrary detention and a trial where the defendant's lawyer is not allowed to speak is not an accepted practice within the international community and should not be an accepted practice in China.

Ms. Kadeer was traveling to meet with congressional staff, official representatives of the U.S. Government, when she was detained. This did not seem to matter to the Chinese and it appears to be one of the factors for the timing of her arrest. Clearly, the Chinese were sending a signal: Any citizen who meets with or talks to United States citizens is risking detention, arrest and a prison sentence.

I call on the Chinese Government to immediately and unconditionally release Rebiya Kadeer, her son, Ablikim Abyirim and her secretary, Kahriman Abdukirim. They have not committed any crimes. Further, I call on the Clinton administration to do everything in its power to secure these releases.

Incidences like this prove that this is not the time to ease the pressure on China. We in the United States, and around the world must never give up our ideals and belief in human freedom, and need to pressure dictators, oppressors and abusers around the world that lack the respect for the rule of law and for human life. Only if Ms. Kadeer's case is brought to the highest level of our Administration and the Chinese Government is there any hope that Ms. Kadeer will not spend the next 8 years of her life in a Chinese prison—8 years she should be spending with her husband and 10 children—and for speaking up for the most basic human rights of her people, the Uighurs.

FOR ITALIANS, ''SOPRANOS'' IS A SOUR NOTE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, it is time to end racial and ethnic stereotyping in our national media. While many ethnic groups have been victimized in this way. Italian-Americans have lately been the target of a hit television program about a family of gangsters, titled ''Sopranos.''

Frankly, all of the Italian-Americans that I know are honest, upstanding citizens who work every day to support their families, to educate their children, and to build their communities. They are blue- and white-collar workers and professionals. They vote, pay taxes, and believe in the American dream that hard work will yield success.

My dear friend and our former colleague in the House of Representatives, the Hon. Frank Guarini, eloquently addressed this issue in a letter to the Wall Street Journal on February 15, 2000.

[From the Wall Street Journal, Feb. 15, 2000]

FOR ITALIANS, ''SOPRANOS'' HIT A BIG, SOUR NOTE

(By Frank J. Guarini)

Eric Gibson's Jan. 28 de gustibus column (''Second Thoughts About a Mob Hit on Sunday Night,'' Taste page, Weekend Journal) correctly notes that the HBO series ''The Sopranos'' and others like it have put a slick entertaining face on a subgroup of criminals who rightly deserve society's harshest condemnation. We wish he had taken his criticism one step further, however, and included the harm that programs like ''The Sopranos'' do to the image of an estimate 20 million Americans of Italian descent.

Thanks to Hollywood and television, Italian Americans see their culture, religion and customs repeatedly used to give ''color'' to stories about organized crime. As a result of such stereotyping, most Americans believe Italian Americans are prone to the same violent, immoral behavior that ''The Sopranos'' offers up as entertainment.

The National Italian American Foundation would like to see HBO present Italian-Americans as they really are: as scientists, educators, military and political leaders and entrepreneurs. It's time for the entertainment industry to balance the false and harmful stereotypes of organized crime figures like Tony Soprano and his mob crew by creating Italian American characters who are educated, law-abiding and articulate.

IN HONOR OF THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OHIO STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the Ohio State Fire Marshal's office on its 100th Anniversary, on April 8, 2000.

The Ohio State Fire Marshal's Office is the oldest established State Fire Marshal's Office in the United States. The office is very proud of its history of fire safety. The Ohio State Fire Marshal serves the citizens of Ohio who rely on the safety of the public buildings in the state, including hospitals, nursing homes, and hotels. They serve and train the firefighters of the state, they investigate cases of arson, and they provide fire safety and fire prevention education to the children in Ohio's school system. The mission of the Ohio State Fire Marshal's office is to ''focus on education, research, regulation, and enforcement in the area of fire safety and fire prevention.''

In order to celebrate this important day and to honor the four living former Ohio Fire Marshals, the Fire Marshal's office has planned a Fire Service Exposition on April 8, 2000. Included in the day's festivities will be safety performances by Ohio firefighters and demonstrations by the Ohio arson dogs, as well as interactive children's activities and historical firefighting exhibitions. The Expo will also honor fallen firefighters with a ''last call'' and bagpipe tribute.

The Fire Marshal plays an important role in preserving the safety of all the citizens of the state of Ohio. Please join me in honoring the Ohio State Fire Marshal's Office on the occasion of its 100th Anniversary.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. HERBERT H. BATEMAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. BATEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I was regrettably absent on Tuesday, March 21, 2000, and consequently missed two recorded votes. Both were conducted under suspension of the rules. Had I been present, I would have voted as follows: H. Con. Res. 288, vote No. 56, "yea"; H. Res. 182, vote No. 57, "yea."

PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

HON. LAMAR S. SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 2000

Mr. SMITH OF TEXAS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit the following article to accompany the speech I gave on March 16, 2000.

[From the Washington Times, Mar. 16, 2000]

PROPERTY OWNERS DUE A HEARING

(By Nancie G. Marzulla)

In 1992, Bernadine Suitum faced the ultimate nightmare for a homeowner. When she was ready to build a retirement house on a lot she and her late husband bought years earlier, she was informed that the property, in the middle of the bustling Incline Village subdivision, suddenly was deemed part of a ''stream environment zone.''

This meant she could not build because a government regulation, imposed after she and her husband had bought the property, required the lot to remain open space. Mrs. Suitum sued the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) for compensation for her property, as the Fifth Amendment explicitly requires in such instances. TRPA argued that her case was not ''ripe'' for court review because there had not been a final agency action.

After six years of bitter litigation, the elderly Mrs. Suitum was carried in her wheelchair into the U.S. Supreme Court—not to be compensated for her property, but merely to win the right to have her case declared ripe for court review. During oral argument, Justice O'Connor turned to the government attorney and asked incredulously, ''Why can't you just let this poor woman have her day in court?''

The House of Representatives is expected to vote on the same question today. H.R. 2372, the Private Property Rights Implementation Act of 1999, was referred out of the House Judiciary last week. If passed, the bill would cut through the bureaucratic red tape that hobbles property owners such as Mrs. Suitum when they attempt to take their constitutional claims to federal court. H.R. 2372 takes head-on the issue of when a case is ripe for court review by defining when an agency action is sufficiently final so court review is appropriate. By providing an objective standard of when enough is enough, the bill eliminates the need for the endless, expensive and excruciating cycle of appeals.

Government attorneys often win cases by taking full advantage of the confusion over when a case is ripe for court review. They win by nitpicking procedural battles, exhausting the resources and the will of property owners. This has had a chilling effect on landowners who know they simply cannot compete with bottomless government resources in a judicial system tilted toward the side with the biggest war chest.