The fact is that what we do in Washington does matter, and matters a lot.

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True, the lion's share of the credit belongs to hard-working men and women around this country who, through industry and innovation, have built this economy. But our people were hard-working in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and yet we suffered with high unemployment in an unsuccessful economy, because we had huge deficits. It is the fiscal responsibility that the President has brought to our Federal Government that has added the one additional element which, with the hard work of the American people, has led to our prosperity.

The second fallacy that we have heard from the Governor of Texas is his statement over and over again that his plan will provide tax relief to all Americans who pay taxes. The facts are otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, some 15 million Americans pay Federal FICA tax that is pulled out of their wages every time, every paycheck; and yet they will receive no, no tax relief under Governor Bush's proposal. Those 15 million Americans who pay FICA taxes to the Federal Government, but do not owe income tax because they are earning the minimum wage, because they are not earning very much, because they are trying to support a family on incomes of $15,000 and $20,000 a year, these low-income taxpayers get nothing from the Governor of Texas. Yet, he does provide 43 percent of his tax benefit to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans.

This leads me to the third fallacy, and that is his statement that he will provide only $223 billion, only $223 billion to the richest 1 percent of Americans. The problem here is fuzzy fiscal figures, because that $223 billion leaves out the effect of the repeal of the estate tax. The Governor will often talk about how he wants to eliminate the estate tax, but will leave out from his budget the fiscal effect of that repeal. The estate tax will be bringing in $50 billion a year, $500 billion over 10 years, and so the governor's tax reduction for those in the wealthiest 1 percent is not $223 billion over 10 years, but over $700 billion over 10 years.

That is why it is true when we point out that the governor would provide more tax relief to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans than everything he proposes to spend to improve our health care system, strengthen Medicare, strengthen our military, and improve education combined.

Mr. Speaker, the choice is clear. On one hand, we can have fiscal responsibility, economic expansion, reduction and eventual elimination of the national debt, and moderate tax cuts for working families, all combined with important investments in education, Medicare, military preparedness, and our health care system. On the other hand, we could choose to provide $700 billion of tax relief over the next 10 years to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the choice before America could never be more stark.

SHALLOW RHETORIC UNDERMINES CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

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

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because I did not get over in time to speak on the motion to instruct conferees, but I think it is time for a reality check with the other side.

We heard a lot of rhetoric, unfortunately, about the education debate on our plan versus the President's plan and how Republicans do not care about the condition of our schools. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that I am one of the few who actually is a classroom teacher in this body. In fact, I spent 7 years teaching in the inner city schools in and around Philadelphia. In fact, I helped to run a chapter 1 program for 3 of those years.

I want to remind my friends on the other side that for the 7 years that I taught, I taught in a portable classroom; two trailers bolted together without adequate heat, without adequate air-conditioning, 32 children in a self-contained environment, in a portable classroom. Guess who was in charge of the government when I taught? It was a Democrat President, a Democrat House and a Democrat Senate. Where was the concern for those of us who were teaching in portable classrooms in inner cities back then when my colleagues controlled the whole ballgame? Where were their efforts to deal with school modernization? Where were their efforts to increase funds for school construction? I was there on the front line teaching in that portable classroom with 32 kids that were challenged in an environment that was very difficult.

Now, I will remind my colleagues on the other side of one further fact. The first 2 years that President Clinton was in office, the Democrats controlled the House and they controlled the Senate. They could have passed any bill they wanted, and we could not stop it. They had all of the votes. We could not have stopped any issue that they wanted to address for the American people.

I find it a little questionable that in the first 2 years of Clinton's administration, when the Democrats controlled the entire ball game, there was no bill for school construction. There was no rhetoric down here on the floor about the need to deal with kids. There was no concern about the people teaching in portable classrooms like I did for 7 years. There was no concern about falling ceilings. What are they telling us? All that occurred within the last 5 years?

The fact is, this is nothing more than political rhetoric. The first 2 years that the Democrats controlled the House and the Senate and the White House when they could have done anything they wanted, they did not even propose a bill to deal with school construction. This Congress has. With a bipartisan piece of legislation that we are going to pass, and hopefully this President will sign, we will do what a responsible Congress could have done 7 years ago, and that is deal with the issue of the need for modernization of our schools.

So I bring up this reality check, Mr. Speaker, because unlike most of my friends who are attorneys who never taught in the classroom, I taught in the classroom for 7 years. I know what it is like to teach in a portable classroom with 2 trailers bolted together, with kids who cannot go outside because when you open the door, the cold is right there. My point is I think a lot of what we heard today is nothing more than shallow rhetoric.

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

(Mr. HILL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

DEMOCRATS DEMONSTRATE SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

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

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to address this issue earlier today, but I came over and after the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) spoke just a minute ago, I felt it incumbent to do so. I too was a classroom teacher. I taught for 9 years, I say to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, 2 more than he did, and I have lived in those classrooms and even had the experiences of the roof falling in, only this was not a roof, it was only a blind that fell and cut my face. We had to evacuate students from classrooms in my building because the walls leaked so badly that the kids could not sit in there because there was so much water.

Granted, that was a couple of decades back. I thought we had pretty much addressed all of that stuff.

Interestingly enough, my daughter today teaches sixth grade math, in Beaumont, Texas, the same school district in which I taught. She has children who do not have chairs in her classroom. They will fix it. They are in portable buildings right now. They are making the repairs in the regular school building.

The problem is that so many school districts do not have the ability to take care of these problems today, and

it is incumbent upon this United States House of Representatives to try to help create the type of innovative financing to help school districts take care of themselves at home. In our State, there is a limit on how much one can raise in property taxes from a property taxpayer.

I was a county school tax assessor collector also for a while following the time that I taught, and I know that they have difficulty raising those dollars. I know what it is like to be a taxpayer, a property taxpayer at home and not be able to pay or afford to pay all of the taxes that we have to try to accomplish the many things that we have to do within our schools to keep our children learning and give them the opportunity to be good productive citizens and not end up either victimizing somebody or being victims themselves or going to jail.

Mr. Speaker, we have not made the right commitment, and that is what this debate is all about. Obviously, we all want to see our schools better. When are we going to make it the priority and do it? Our colleagues on the Republican side clearly have not done that.

Our own State of Texas has a plan in the Republican platform for its State to abolish the U.S. Department of Education. That to me does not speak to a commitment to make education better in this country.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. LAMPSON. I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, I too listened to the other speaker and I too am I classroom teacher. I taught for 9 years, middle school math, in a very poor, rural area.

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, that is what my daughter teaches.

Mrs. THURMAN. Mr. Speaker, I too worked in one of those places that nobody wants to talk about, those portables. But I say to the gentleman, I am tired of hearing on this floor about how we controlled the House and we controlled the Senate for those first 2 years with the presidency. We were paying down a debt. There was no money. There could be no discussion about these issues. And on top of that, we had our States, because at that time I was in the State Senate in the 1980s, and this country was going through a recession. There was no money in the States to deal with these problems. So these things just went up and up and up.

Now, they want to come and say well, you did not do anything about it. Well, this is the first time we have had any surpluses to even be able to talk about it, and now what we are trying to talk about is $25 billion to do school construction, and the rest of the K through 3 program where we have been putting teachers.

I am also tired of hearing about how we are taking this away from the local level, it is their issue, they ought to be able to control it. Ask them to go look in their State legislatures. How many of them have adopted the goal to make K through 3 education top priority in reducing class size? How many States in this country are doing after-school programs? How many of these? In fact, just 2 years ago, when this whole school construction came up, our State legislature was having to call a special session to deal with the issue of school construction.

Yes, we are talking about it now because we have an opportunity to talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman yielding me this time.

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the gentlewoman's comments.

It is clear, there is a difference in commitment to this issue. The Democrats indeed want to attempt to make a real difference, and I hope that instead of asking, as the gentlewoman well stated, instead of asking the question, where were you while we were in control, well, why has there not been some commitment, some effort to truly explain what the Republican commitment is while they have been in control of this House of Representatives in the last several years. I think we are doing so, and we are doing so in a responsible manner; and I hope that with our continued push that we will achieve that.

IMPROVING HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my Democratic colleagues who have joined me on the floor today for this Special Order hour. We are here this afternoon on a beautiful fall day, here in this House Chamber, trying to urge this Congress not to adjourn for the year until we finish the job of meeting the health care needs of America's families.

Democrats in the House have worked for the entire 2-year session of this Congress to give America's families a strong Patients' Bill of Rights to ensure that you and your family make your health care along with your doctor, rather than having some insurance clerk who has never had a day of medical training, decide the treatment that you need. We have worked to make sure that when you are ill and when you are fighting for your life, that you do not have to also fight your insurance company to get the help that you need.

Democrats in this Congress have been united also in the fight to give a prescription drug benefit to our senior citizens. We have worked for an optional part D under Medicare to guarantee that our seniors will never again have to make the choice between buying groceries and paying the rent or filling their prescriptions. And the Democrats in this Congress are united in our efforts to protect Americans' access to quality health care. We are fighting as we speak during the ongoing negotiations in the closing days of this Congress to answer the pleas from our hospitals, from our home health care providers, from our nursing homes and our other health care providers that we must strengthen Medicare, because many of us know that we have Medicare-dependent hospitals that will close their doors if Congress fails to get this job done.

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Home health agencies have already closed by the thousands and our teaching hospitals are no longer able to pursue teachers, research, and indigent care due to lack of funding.

The American people have a right to know where this Republican-controlled Congress has failed to lead and failed to solve these pressing problems that confront every American family.

They have a right to know who is on their side, and they have a right to know who is fighting for them. The answer is all too clear. The Republican-controlled Congress has become the special-interest-controlled Congress. The powerful special interests are in the driver's seat, and the public interests are in the backseat.

On these three critical issues, patient protection, prescription drugs and protecting Medicare, the Republicans have danced to the tune of the big insurance companies and the big prescription drug manufacturers.

On patient protection, the powerful insurance industry has fought in every State legislature and in this Congress to defeat meaningful patient rights. I carried the first patient protection legislation in the country when I was a State senator in Texas. The State Senate there and the State House voted almost unanimously in favor of a bipartisan patient protection bill. That bill was vetoed by Governor Bush, and he vetoed it after the legislature had adjourned when we had no opportunity to override.

Fortunately, the legislature came back in the next session 2 years later and passed almost the identical package in four parts, and Governor Bush signed three, but let the fourth, regarding accountability of HMOs, become law without his signature.

Fortunately, we have patient protection in many of our States, but we know that we must also pass a Federal bill to be sure that all patients under all plans are covered with these protections.

Early in this session of Congress, this House passed a strong patients' bill of rights with near unanimous support from Democrats and the courageous support of Republican Members, like the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr.