PERMANENT RESIDENCY FOR LIBERIANS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise tonight to express my deep disappointment that this final package does not include a provision that allows Liberian nationals living in this country to adjust to permanent residency.

As I have told this body many times, approximately 10,000 Liberians fled to the United States beginning in 1989 when their country became engulfed in a civil war. In 1991, Attorney General Barr granted Liberians Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and renewed it in 1992. Under the Clinton administration, Attorney General Reno continued to renew TPS for Liberians on an annual basis until last year when she granted Deferred Enforced Departure. DED was renewed again this year.

While Liberians can now legally live in the United States for another year, it does not change the fact that they have lived in limbo for almost a decade. The Liberians have lived in a ''protected status'' longer than any other group in the history of this country. These individuals have played by the rules. From the beginning, they have always lived in this country legally. They have established careers, opened businesses, bought homes, had American-born children, and contributed to our communities. Yet, they are unable to enjoy the basic rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship. These people deserve better.

For several years I have been working to see that the Liberians receive the justice they deserve. In March 1999, I introduced S. 656, the Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act which would allow Liberian nationals who had received TPS to adjust to permanent residency. For almost two years I have been unable to convince my colleagues to hold a hearing, debate this issue on the floor, or pass the bill. I did everything I believed was necessary to garner support for this legislation. I spoke on the floor, I wrote ''Dear Colleagues'', I gathered cosponsors on both sides of the aisle, I spoke personally with the leadership of both parties and the White House. Despite these efforts, the plight of the Liberians has not been recognized and their status has not been resolved.

The situation facing the Liberians is not a novel issue for Congress. In the time that the Liberians have lived in this country, several other immigrant groups, including 52,000 Chinese, 4,996 Poles, 200,000 El Salvadorans, 50,000 Guatemalans and 150,000 Nicaraguans, who lived in the U.S. under temporary protective status for far less time have been allowed to adjust to permanent status. Just last month we passed a bill adjusting the status of 4,000 Syrian Jews. There are those who have argued that it is time to stop passing ''nation specific'' immigration fixes and to implement a system that is comprehensive and fair. I fully agree. But until we reach that point and are ready to pass such legislation, I do not believe that we can, in good conscious, arbitrarily deny certain groups a remedy for the unintended and unjust consequences of our immigration law.

I would also like to state that I believe that we have a special obligation to the Liberians because of the special ties the U.S. has with that country. Congress should honor the special relationship that has always existed between the United States and Liberia. In 1822, groups of freed slaves from the U.S. began to settle on the coast of Western Africa with the assistance of private American philanthropic organizations at the behest of the U.S. government. In 1847, these settlers established the republic of Liberia, the first independent country in Africa. Liberians modeled their constitution after the U.S. and named their capital Monrovia after President James Monroe. Mr. President, many of the Liberian nationals in this country can trace their ancestry to American slaves. We owe them more than we are giving them tonight.

When Liberians arrived in this country, they expected to stay only a short time and to return home once it was safe. But one year turned into many and they moved on with their lives. They are now part of our community. They deserve the same benefits that we have given so many others—the rights of citizenship. It is my hope that we can address this grievous situation early in the 107th Congress. We need to right a wrong.

RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES' NEW CHILD HEALTH PROGRAM

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise to recognize the Houston arrival of a Ronald McDonald Care Mobile—a state-of-the-art pediatric mobile healthcare unit. It is one of the first in an innovative initiative of the Ronald McDonald House Charities, known and respected worldwide for its dedication to improving children's health.

In cooperation with its local affiliates and local hospitals or health systems, RMHC has begun rolling out these Ronald McDonald Care Mobiles to bring free medical and dental services to children in underserved communities. The Houston Ronald McDonald Care Mobile will be operated and staffed by the Harris County Hospital District. It will travel, on a regular schedule, to schools, churches, apartment complexes and other neighborhood sites where need is great. This RMHC partnership will significantly strengthen the District's capacity to serve the county's disadvantaged children and their families.

The Ronald McDonald Care Mobiles are a far cry from the usual converted vans and school buses. They are specially-designed pediatricians' offices on wheels, with two patient examination rooms, a laboratory, reception and medical records areas and, in some cases, a hearing screening booth and dental hygiene room. The units are also staffed to deliver first-rate care. Staffing will vary according to local needs but is likely to include a pediatrician, a pediatric nurse, and a manager. There may also be a social worker, a dental hygienist, an asthma specialist and/or medical residents, nursing students, and interns in training.

The Ronald McDonald Care Mobiles will go directly into underserved communities. They will provide primary care, including immunizations and medical screenings; diagnosis, treatment, referral, and followup for serious medical and dental conditions; and health education for children and their families. Staff will also help eligible families obtain government-assisted health insurance and will partner with communities to address critical local childhood health needs.

Our children are our nation's most precious resource. We are all beholden to the Ronald McDonald House Charities for bringing vital health care to the underserved so that they may learn and play and grow up strong. This truly is giving back to the community at its finest.

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, fourteen years ago, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, IRCA. That Act has had undeniably profound effects on the nation—both positive and negative. IRCA set into motion the current legalization program, which has brought millions of individuals out of the shadows of illegal immigrant status and onto a path of temporary status, permanent status and, ultimately, United States citizenship. At the same time, IRCA authorized employer sanctions which, in addition to not deterring illegal immigration, have led to a false document industry and caused discrimination against Latino, Asian, other immigrant workers, and even United States citizens, who by their accent or appearance are wrongly perceived as being here illegally.

Many of us supported the provision in IRCA which created an office to address cases of discrimination resulting from employer sanctions. Since then, the Department of Justice Office of Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices, OSC, has enforced the anti-discrimination provisions and provided relief to workers who have faced immigration-related job discrimination.

One of the innovative accomplishments of OSC has been to develop effective partnerships with state and local government civil rights agencies. A Memoranda of Understanding enables the civil rights agencies who are supposed to work together to do just that. As a result, all agencies are better equipped to prevent and eradicate discrimination.

Recently, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination joined