Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) for the leadership that they have shown and displayed.

I just left the markup in the Committee on Education and the Workforce where we have been babbling, I guess one could say, all day long. We have been debating Head Start. And there are certain principles that we have tried to maintain, and one is that the program must be kept comprehensive. It must remain comprehensive and not be streamlined and categorized so that young people will get the full benefit of the most effective program that we have had coming out of the civil rights movement, coming out of the war on poverty. No other program has been as successful as this one.

We also have to make sure that the block granting does not creep in, and we have obviously crept up, and they are down to talking about eight States now that would be demonstration projects, but we have got to watch that because those eight States will still represent one-third of all the children in Head Start.

So if we are talking about eight States with large populations, with large populations of Head Start children, then that becomes a significant number. We are still opposed to the block granting all the way.

We know that we need additional funding, especially as we now have a mandate that 50 percent of the teachers ought to have a college degree by 2008. But how does one get a college degree if one is a Head Start teacher making $12,000, $15,000, $10,000, $11,000, $14,000 a year without some help. So we are proposing stipends and scholarships, things that are going to help those individuals.

And I was pleased to note that I did get an amendment accepted a few minutes ago that will call for the creation of a fatherhood initiative, and I noticed that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) mentioned that, as a father, we find that many fathers are absent from the lives of their children and that one of the things that we can do in Head Start is stimulate the growth and development of that.

So I just, again, want to commend all of my colleagues here, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) as he leads the Congressional Black Caucus, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE), and it was good to see the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ), chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and I know that the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) is here, and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE) who has been doing an outstanding job in the Committee on Education and the Workforce, we have been there together all day. So I thank the chairman so much.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Let me just say this, Mr. Speaker. The Congressional Black Caucus is very concerned about this issue along with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and sometimes I think what happens is so often people will hear the words Congressional Black Caucus or hear the towards Congressional Hispanic Caucus and think that we are only addressing issues that affect African American and Hispanic people. That is simply not true. The issues that we address go to the very center of people's lives, and I can think of nothing greater that allows a person to be all that they can be than health issues, making sure they have prescriptions that they need and making sure that our children have the education that they need so that they can get to their destiny.

I have often said that our children are the living messages we send to a future we will never see, and the question is what kind of message do we send if we deny a child who was born into poverty? That child did not ask to be born into poverty, but he is born into poverty or she, and so that child has a struggle from the very, very beginning. And I think that if we can help a child at 3 years old and give that child a proper foundation so that they could then go forward in life and have what I call consistent appointments with success, then that child grows up, and that child possibly could be the person who finds a cure to pancreatic cancer or could become the President of the United States.

But when they are denied that opportunity at an early age, then so often they go off the road as a straight and narrow path, and the next thing we know, we see them as I see them in my district, so many of them dropping out of school, so many of young ladies having babies as teenagers, and we see the problems that they are confronted with. And Head Start is a program, Mr. Speaker, that has effectively addressed those problems, and again with regard to the prescription drugs, we have to stand up for our seniors.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on my special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

□ 1815

PRESERVING HEAD START

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVIS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, to a number of people around the country it is approximately 15 minutes after 6 in the East, about a quarter after 5 in my neck of the woods in central Alabama; and a lot of people are coming home right now from working on the assembly lines, a lot of people are coming from working in the nursing homes and the places where hard work is done in this country, and a lot of them picked up their children from Head Start.

A lot of them are coming home now, and they are watching this debate, and they are asking a very basic question: Why is this House even assessing the question of Head Start? Why is this House even talking about dismantling Head Start, when in their own lives they see this program has been so enormously successful?

There is an old maxim that if something is not broke, you do not fix it; and the perspective of a large number of people I represent in Birmingham, Alabama, and Selma and Tuscaloosa and in all of the rural counties in my State is that this has been a part of the War on Poverty that has endured. This program, which was launched in the 1960s, has endured, it has survived, and it has notably commanded bipartisan support.

As I talk to friends of mine on the other side of the aisle, particularly friends of mine who have served in State legislatures, a good many of them away from this floor will express that this is a program that has been successful.

So many people wonder why, as we talk about reform, as we talk about changing the educational system in this country, why we are targeting this particular program; and I will make three basic points to follow up on what my very able colleagues from Maryland and California said earlier.

The first one is that this program has been an enormously effective holistic program. It has been a program that has helped not simply make children more literate, but has frankly helped to make children better young men and women, better equipped to participate in school, better equipped to live in their communities.

It is not simply a reading program, it is not simply a literacy program, and to try to limit it or to cabinet it to just those areas deprives the program of some of its potential.

Another very basic point, as we talk about block granting this program even for just eight states, we know the reality of block grants has been that as the programs devolved to the States, the States are often unconstrained in how they spend the money. They are often unconstrained in their vision of how the money should be spent.

I know in my State of Alabama we are facing enormous budget consequences now, and in the States most of us represent our States are fiscally struggling. They are not asking for more programs to be put on their plate from an administrative or financing standpoint. If anything, they want

more help from Washington, D.C., not more requirement that they administer particular programs that are being transferred from Washington.

A third point: we often talk about representing the interests of people whose voices are not heard in our society. It is crystal clear to me that among the most unrepresented people that we have are the children who are living in poverty and the children who are living in families that are standing at the edge of economic security.

Just one week ago, this House failed to pass a child tax credit, a manageable child tax credit bill that would have helped a lot of those families. It would be a shame if next week or in the weeks to come that we decided that we were going to attack those families in just one more little way, by changing this program that has benefited so many of them.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, when this issue comes on the floor, when we begin to talk as a body about Head Start, I hope that we understand it has been a success, and I hope we understand that so many families in districts like mine around this country look to this program; and we ought to be finding a way to preserve it, we ought to be finding a way to help connect with these children, because if we lose them, as the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) said so well a few minutes ago, we are losing a potential talent base that we have not discovered. We are losing people that have the chance to do an enormous amount in their lives.

We need to be nurturing them, helping them; and this program has been an example of what government can do at its best. There are some of us in this body, Mr. Speaker, who still believe that government has a high and noble purpose. Not that it is the only answer, but that it can do something to touch and connect with the lives of people who have been left behind.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEAD START

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

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, as we continue to discuss the importance of Head Start, the Head Start program to our communities, I want to draw attention to a resolution that I offered, H. Res. 238, expressing support for the Head Start program, which has had such a positive impact on the lives of millions of children nationwide.

This resolution not only recognizes the contributions of Head Start; it also supports maintaining its current designation at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Earlier this week, I participated in a hearing convened by our chairman, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) of the Congressional Black Caucus, where we had an opportunity to hear from those who are directly involved in administering the program, including Maxim Thorne, executive director of the New Jersey Head Start Association. He expressed his concern about the effort to block grant the program, which he said would have a devastating impact on New Jersey's Head Start children.

The majority backed off of the block grant to all of the programs, but selected eight States, one of which is New Jersey. The eight States carry about one-third of the children, as was indicated by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS).

Most of the States selected are States that have financial problems, as we have in New Jersey. In New Jersey, we are already grappling with the Abbott decision, which was a decision where our Supreme Court of New Jersey said that every child in New Jersey is entitled to a thorough and efficient education.

The State administration is before the courts asking for relief from that decision, saying that the budget is tight, they have constraints, they cannot fully fund this court order; and they are asking to be allowed to delay and defer programs under the Abbott decision.

What will happen when the Head Start money comes? It will be very tempting to see if perhaps this money can go further and be used in trying to comply with the Abbott decision. I think it is wrong, and I definitely oppose it, as do all of the members of the Democratic Party on the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

Also echoed by our executive director of the Head Start program was the provision which would allow for open discrimination of Head Start workers based on religion. This goes against everything our Nation stands for.

Mr. Speaker, Head Start has a proud and successful history. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson gave his State of the Union Address before Congress and our Nation with an announcement to declare war on poverty. In his declaration, he believed, for the first time in history, poverty could be eradicated, and offered his proposal, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

Despite opposition that believed poverty was on the decline from the heights of the Great Depression, President Johnson was undaunted. He declared the act does not merely expand old programs or improve what is already being done, it takes a new course. It strikes at the causes, not just the consequences of poverty. It can be a milestone in our 180-year search for a better life for our people.

After the bill was signed into law, an Office of Economic Opportunity was created to fulfill its mission. At the same time, a pediatrician by the name of Dr. Robert Cooke was asked by the head of this new office to lead a steering committee to come up with specialists to find out what should be done.

The Cooke memorandum outlined what we know as the Head Start program. Launched as an 8-week summer program, Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to help meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs.

Since its inception, Head Start has served over 20 million children. Today it is a full-day, full-year program providing pre-school children of low-income, working families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutrition, and parental support needs.

Head Start's focus on the whole child extends to recognizing the importance of the family, not the institution. Throughout its history, Head Start has included parents in both their child's education and membership in the Head Start Policy Council, which serves as a vital link between the community and the public and private agencies. Parental involvement is a critical and integral part of the program. Economically deprived families are no longer seen as passive recipients of service, but rather as active, respected participants and decision-makers.

So, as I conclude, with the average child care cost in my State of New Jersey over $5,000 a child, thousands of children across the State and others would not have had access to an exceptional program that has them ready to learn by the time they enter kindergarten if Head Start was not there to serve them. Terms such as ''State options'' and ''coordination'' will mean shortchanging and ending a 38-year program which has proven to be successful to millions of children.

We need to move towards full funding of Head Start. We need to support and preserve the Head Start program. I look forward to working with my colleagues to accomplish this goal.

EXPANDING MEDICARE

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

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, today in the Committee on Energy and Commerce we are marking up the most critical expansion of Medicare since its inception 37 years ago.

As you might have expected, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the bill is not perfect. It needs work. There are two amendments that I will introduce to strengthen the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003.

My first amendment will ensure that diseases that disproportionately affect the African American community will be highlighted in the disease management component of the bill. The diseases that need to be highlighted include prostate and colon cancer, hypertension, and obesity.

The current language in the chairman's mark does not include enough diseases that should be highlighted in