

communities and poverty rural communities that the Federal Government found necessary to address when the Elementary and Secondary Education System Act was established.

Why should we abandon the very schools and communities that the Elementary and Secondary Education System Act was meant to help? There is no honorable trade-off possible for block grants and vouchers. We hope that, in the negotiations, there will be a flat refusal to trade off with the Republicans on block grants and vouchers.

The bad news is that Republicans have turned their backs on education as the number one priority of the American people. But the good news is that Democrats have responded vigorously. All year long, we have made proposals.

Democrats have proposed two school construction initiatives. One that most people know about is the Rangel-Johnson initiative that proposes to pay the interest on money borrowed by States and local governments. Up to \$25 billion would be covered by a Federal allocation of about \$4 billion to cover the interest. The President has also proposed a direct appropriations initiative of \$1.3 billion.

Democrats support funding for smaller class sizes. Democrats support funding for more teachers in the classrooms, and therefore the ratio of students to teachers would be a more acceptable ratio and encourage greater teaching.

But one cannot have smaller class sizes if one does not have the classrooms. The construction initiative is vital to the implementation of the Democratic initiative to get smaller class sizes. Certainly in the poorest schools in the poorest communities, we do not have the classes for the smaller class sizes.

The 21st century learning centers proposed by the Democrats for after-school programs, for summer school programs, those programs also need room to operate in. One cannot operate effective summer schools unless one has buildings that are air conditioned in most parts of the country.

The community technology centers are an initiative of this Democratic administration. They want to expand that. We need space. We need buildings.

An increase in Head Start and preschool programs is another Democratic initiative. We cannot increase Head Starts in the poorest communities where they are most needed. We cannot increase preschool programs in the poorest communities where they are most needed unless we have new facilities. We have to have better buildings and more buildings in order to accommodate these programs.

In our inner-city communities, school construction comes first. In Brooklyn, in my 11th Congressional District, we worked vigorously to get rid of coal burning schools, schools that have furnaces that burn coal. I am

happy to report that the end is almost in sight, that the School Construction Authority in New York City has an agenda where by the end of the year 2001, there will be no more coal burning furnaces in our schools.

It is imperative that we act now to construct more schools. The Democratic initiative is necessary.

EDUCATION

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the public schools in our country. I know that should not be a major statement, but after hearing all of what people want to do with vouchers and everything else, maybe we need to have an affirmative affirmation that says, yes, we support our public schools in our country.

Some of the key priorities for our public schools are class size reduction, school modernization, and technology improvements of both our elementary and our secondary schools.

We need to fund the President's plans for school modernization and class size reduction, to ensure that our most valuable national resource, our children, will not continue to suffer from substandard school facilities and overcrowded classrooms.

Studies by the National Center for Education Statistics show that, on the average, public schools in America are 42 years old. School buildings begin rapid deterioration after 40 years. Additionally, 30 percent of our schools were built before 1970 and have never been renovated.

These schools are also lagging behind in our efforts to connect every classroom to the Internet. Only 42 percent of schools built before 1985 are connected to the Internet, compared to almost 60 percent of those built since.

According to GAO's estimate, it would cost \$112 billion to bring all our Nation's schools into good overall condition.

In my home State of Texas, where my wife teaches algebra, we have over 4 million students in almost 7,000 schools. Of those schools, 76 percent of the Texas schools need repairs or upgrades just to reach the "good" condition; 46 percent need repairs to a building such as plumbing, electrical, heating or cooling systems; 60 percent have at least one environmental quality like air quality, ventilation, or lighting; and the student-to-computer ratio stands 11 to 1, 11 to 1 student-computer ratio. So one just has to wait one's turn for the use of that computer.

The cost for this alone in Texas is estimated to be \$10 billion to modernize school infrastructure and over \$4 billion to address the technology needs.

Aging schools, however, are not the only problem we have before us. We have to address the growing student population.

Again, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, elementary and secondary school enrollment, already at a record-high 52.7 million, will climb to 54.3 million by 2008.

Again, in Texas, we see similar trends. Our education system has stretched past a breaking point when one adds in the expected growth in the number of students.

Over the next decade, the number of students in the elementary and secondary schools are expected to grow almost 8 percent in Texas alone, approximately 316,000 students. It is estimated almost 13,000 new classrooms will have to be built to handle this influx of new students.

Voters in my own hometown in Houston are trying to address this problem. In a recent Houston ISD bond election, they approved \$678 million to repair over 70 schools and to build 10 new ones. Fifty of the schools in HISD are over 50 years old. Twenty-five are over 70 years old. Much more is needed because they downsized it.

Also, voters in the Aldine school district where my wife teaches just approved a \$115.8 million bond package that would fund six new schools, a transportation center, and would provide upgrades for existing campuses.

Aldine Independent School District is already feeling the impact of increased enrollment with the number of students having grown over 1,200 each year for the last 7 years.

\$678 million and \$115 million sound like a lot of money, but it is really a drop in the bucket. School populations continue to increase, newer schools are beginning to show wear and tear; and facilities must be upgraded to keep our schools equipped with the cutting edge technology our children will need to be competitive in tomorrow's job market.

These numbers show that it is absolutely vital that Congress address the conditions of our Nation's schools now because the situation will obviously get worse.

Now, most of the school construction comes from, first, local money but also State money. But we need to make sure that we help what we can. Even if it is only a few pennies on the dollar, Mr. Speaker, we can help. That is the reason I support the President's plan to reduce the class size and build more classrooms.

Additionally, I join my colleagues from around the country sponsoring legislation that will make tax credit bonds available to our schools, offer incentives for teachers who choose to teach at low-income or underserved areas and offer tax credits and student loan forgiveness for college students who choose to make teaching their profession.

I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting these important initiatives, and that we can work together and provide funding for our schools to educate our children. Our most important natural resource is the brains in our children that are being educated today.