

SUPPORTING A NATIONAL
CHARTER SCHOOLS WEEK

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 95) supporting a National Charter Schools Week, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 95

Whereas charter schools are public schools authorized by a designated public body and operating on the principles of accountability, parental involvement, choice, and autonomy;

Whereas in exchange for the flexibility and autonomy given to charter schools, they are held accountable by their sponsors for improving student achievement and for their financial and other operations;

Whereas 36 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have passed laws authorizing charter schools;

Whereas 35 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will have received more than \$500,000,000 in grants from the Federal Government by the end of the current fiscal year for planning, startup, and implementation of charter schools since their authorization in 1994 under part C of title X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8061 et seq.);

Whereas 34 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are serving approximately 550,000 students in more than 2,150 charter schools during the 2000 to 2001 school year;

Whereas charter schools can be vehicles both for improving student achievement for students who attend them and for stimulating change and improvement in all public schools and benefiting all public school students;

Whereas charter schools in many States serve significant numbers of students with lower income, minority students, and students with disabilities;

Whereas the Charter Schools Expansion Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-278) amended the Federal grant program for charter schools authorized by part C of title X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8061 et seq.) to strengthen accountability provisions at the Federal, State, and local levels to ensure that charter public schools are of high quality and are truly accountable to the public;

Whereas 7 of 10 charter schools report having a waiting list;

Whereas students in charter schools nationwide have similar demographic characteristics as students in all public schools;

Whereas charter schools have enjoyed broad bipartisan support from the Administration, the Congress, State governors and legislatures, educators, and parents across the Nation; and

Whereas charter schools are laboratories of reform and serve as models of how to educate children as effectively as possible: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That—

(1) the Congress acknowledges and commends the charter school movement for its contribution to improving our Nation's public school system; and

(2) it is the sense of the Congress that—

(A) a National Charter Schools Week should be established; and

(B) the President should issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to conduct appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities to demonstrate

support for charter schools in communities throughout the Nation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. ROEMER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the concurrent resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of House Concurrent Resolution 95, which acknowledges and commends the charter school movement for its contribution to improving our Nation's public school system, and calls for a National Charter Schools Week to be established.

We have all seen the results of inflicting the many unfunded mandates on our Nation's public schools, and believe that the charter school movement, led by California, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, New Mexico, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin in the early 1990s, is a direct result of the desire for parents to increase their personal involvement and control of their children's education.

My home State of Florida passed its charter school law in 1996. The latest information available shows that there are 149 charter schools operating in the State of Florida serving over 27,000 students.

New charter schools have swept the country to the point of including 36 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico. This represents a clear change in how education is disseminated across the great country.

There are nearly 2,150 charter schools across the country serving almost 550,000 children. Laboratories of learning are being established from coast-to-coast, and the common denominator between them all is a staunch desire for local hands-on control by parents and teachers. From back-to-back basic schools in Arizona to magnet programs in Colorado, they are all proving that there is not just one way to teach.

Two weeks ago, the State of Indiana passed a very strong charter school law which will likely rank the State in the top dozen of States with the strongest laws. This is an outstanding victory for parents and teachers, who have been waiting a long time to affect their children's education in a positive way.

A recent report by professor Scott Milliman of James Madison University, Frederick Hess, and Robert Maranto of the University of Virginia, and social psychologist April Gresham, revealed that the establishment of charter

schools has spurred noticeable differences in the public school system.

For example, based on a March, 1998, survey of Arizona public school teachers, the researchers concluded that the power of choice and market competition from charter schools led to the following changes between the 1994-1995 and the 1997-1998 school years.

First, districts made greater attempts to inform parents about school programs and options. Second, districts placed greater emphasis on promoting professional development for teachers. Third, school principals increased consultation with the teaching staffs.

The authors also found that charter schools do not replace district schools, but rather, push district schools to compete, primarily because State subsidies follow the students.

This resolution supporting National Charter Schools Week must be used as a means of celebrating true diversity: diversity in education, diversity in learning, and diversity in thought. Supporting National Charter Schools Week lends credence to the proclamation that not everyone thinks alike and not everyone learns alike.

Combined with the Charter Schools Expansion Act from the 105th Congress, it acknowledges the success of thinking outside the box by supporting and commending those communities who have chosen to take control of their own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Florida for helping manage the bill here today, a charter school bill which will establish this week as the National Charter Schools Week, named House Resolution 95.

As our Founding Fathers contemplated the importance of what American society might look like in the ensuing decades after they wrote the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison all talked of the extreme importance put forward on an enlightened society, on an educated society.

Now, today, in the year 2001, we should put even more importance on our public education school system, on a system that is visionary, that is accountable, that is flexible, that provides more public school choices to our parents to send their children to the very best kinds of schools.

Charter schools, I believe, are part of this effort. Charter schools are part of an effort to provide more vision, more flexibility, more reform, more options, more parental choices, more teacher curriculum, curriculum developed at the local level into the schools.

They might even expand on the school day or the length of the school year, providing more and more options for our schools in an increasingly global-oriented economy.

When our kids fail, if our kids do not succeed in public education today, it is almost as if a death sentence has been laid upon their heads. If they fail and drop out of school as a third-grader, at 13, or if one does not get that high school degree, our children are almost destined to failure, or oriented toward juvenile reform, prison, and problems where it gets increasingly difficult for us to rescue them. So charter schools are part of this effort to reform our schools and change the way we currently educate our children.

I am also extremely pleased, as we talk about charter schools, that very soon after the State legislature has passed a new charter school bill, the Governor of our State, Governor Frank O'Bannon, will sign Indiana's charter schools into law.

□ 1530

We will become the 38th State with charter schools in this Nation. Charter Schools Week will seek to recognize the accomplishment of charter schools around the country. Charter Schools, as I said before, stress the principles of accountability, parent flexibility, choice and autonomy. Charter schools are public schools that respond to an increasingly high demand for choices from parents, from students, from teachers designed at the local level so that we can respond to the challenges in that local community.

All different kinds of States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are serving more than 500,000 students in almost 2,100 charter schools.

I am especially happy that in many of these charter schools, we have about 7 out of 10 have waiting lists. Seven out of 10 of the charter schools have people waiting to get more of their students into the schools. So that proves that more and more parents want to get their children into a charter school.

There is a criticism of charter schools, and that is that some of them have been shut down, some of them have not worked. We have about a 4 percent failure rate in our charter schools. There are some that do not want to talk about that. As a matter of fact, I think the fact that charter schools are accountable can be closed down, can be reconstituted, can be put on probation and turned around or permanently closed, I think, is a benefit in favor of charter schools.

Out of over 2,000 charter schools, 59, 59 have closed down for various reasons; that is about a 4 percent failure rate, about a 4 percent failure rate at the over 2,100 charter schools where we can make them accountable, where we can reconstitute them, where we can put them on probation and ultimately either make them perform better, close them down and allow students to go to other public schools.

I am also very proud of the fact that as we look at charter schools across the country, whether they are in California or Arizona or the first State to

have charter schools, Minnesota, charter schools also reflect the diversity of our schools across the country in public education.

We have a charter school out in California, where we have had people come in to testify before our Committee on Education and the Workforce called Fenton Charter School, which has over 90 percent eligible for free and reduced lunches, over 90 percent African American and Hispanic enrollment rate, and have seen incredibly good increases in the scores in mathematics, in science, in reading take place since it has changed to a charter school.

So we are seeing schools that reflect a rich diversity of this country, have charter schools and then succeed in terms of educating, graduating and promoting their students.

I am delighted to join with my colleagues today in this resolution, H. Con. Res. 95 to establish this week as National Charter Schools Week. I am anxious to talk about charter schools as we start debate tomorrow in the Committee on Education and the Workforce as we reauthorize the ESEA Act as we look forward to, hopefully, a bipartisan bill that is going to move us forward in terms of our education reform in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON), who, I think, has been a very, very eloquent and articulate spokesperson for public education in this country and someone who has been to many of the charter schools that are here in the District of Columbia.

I have had the pleasure of going to two or three of those schools and have seen the great job that many of those charter schools are doing with respect to students with limited English proficiency, with respect to students eligible for free and reduced lunches, and the increased graduation rates that those schools are achieving in the District of Columbia.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I kindly thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. ROEMER) for yielding the time to me.

I congratulate him and the sponsor of this resolution, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER). I want to commend him for his leadership, particularly on charter schools, which stands out in the stellar leadership that he has given on the issue of education during his years in the Congress.

I come to the floor because the District of Columbia is proud to say that it has probably, I think I can say without contradiction, a greater percentage of its children in charter schools than any school district in the United States. And part of the reason for this is the accommodation of the Congress with me in 1995.

There were fierce fights about vouchers and the imposition of vouchers on the District of Columbia. And, yet, the majority had a point, you cannot say to somebody in the first grade, we will get these schools fixed maybe by the time you are out of school altogether.

The child is in the first grade only once, and I was particularly open to the notion of charter schools as an alternative to the public schools of the District of Columbia, even though I was then and remain opposed to vouchers which the people of the District of Columbia strongly oppose, believing that public money should go to public schools, either public schools in the regular public school system or public charter schools; and we believe that our experience indicates that this is by far the best alternative for those truly searching for an alternative to public schools which need fixing.

The Congress passed a school reform bill which was, in essence, a public charter bill for the District of Columbia in 1995. Look what has happened since then. Thirteen percent of all public school students in the District of Columbia are enrolled in 40 public charter schools. There are public charter schools in seven out of our eight wards. Nearly two thirds of all the public charter school students qualify for free or reduced lunch, yet about half of our public charter schools offer academically rigorous curricula of the liberal arts.

Many of the rest offer curricula in particular subject matters, the arts, foreign language, immersion, technology.

The rate at which charter schools have come on line in the District of Columbia is a model for an alternative school system within the public school system for our country. Over 70 percent of the D.C. public charter schools have fewer than 300 students and small classes are the norm in these charter schools. Many of the parents say they want the charter schools for this reason; they wanted smaller classes. They wanted smaller schools, and they wanted to be freed from the central bureaucracy of the public school system.

They wanted to innovate. Interestingly at the moment, Mr. Speaker, the scores of our public school children are better than the scores of our charter school children. Our public schools have a new mayor, a new school board and new rigor; but we are proud and pleased that we have this great diversity of charter schools here.

The charter schools have pushed our public schools, so that now our public schools are doing very much better than they were doing. And the very thing that we said we wanted the charter schools to do, to be a competitive force to the public schools, has come true.

We do not believe, by the way, that private schools would be that kind of competitive force, because the private schools are outside of the public school systems. We have some of the best private schools in the United States, some of the best private Catholic schools and some of the best private schools that are secular. But when you see a school in your neighborhood dealing with precisely the same children you are dealing with last year and they now have

moved to another school and they would rather be in that school, that, my friend, is competition.

That is why we believe that the best competition for the public schools are not vouchers, are not fancy schools, by or whatever other name you call them. But a charter school right next to a public school where the child is going, compare how those children are doing, and then you will have real competition between your public school and your charter school. And your public school will do what our public schools are doing, our public schools will have to do better.

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON), my classmate from the 1990's election, that in the charter schools that I have visited across the country, certainly the charter schools in the District of Columbia stand out as some of the very best.

I remember charter schools that I visited a couple of years ago right here on the Hill, where they had smaller classes, they were also teaching some of the more challenged students, students that had actually dropped out of other schools and had, I believe, a 15 percent to 20 percent higher graduation rate from that particular charter school than the surrounding public schools taking on some of the most at-risk and challenging students.

I commend the job that those charter schools are doing. These charter schools are a choice, a public school choice, a supplement to the system. I know in the charter schools that I visited in Chicago that they are part of the reform efforts successfully taking place to make the Chicago schools better and better and better schools in one of the biggest school districts in the country.

We are delighted to have this resolution before us.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 95, supporting National Charter Schools Week.

Franklin Roosevelt once said that, "we cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." I truly believe that statement. The proper education of all children is essential in order to build our youth for the future. We do not have a more important issue in American today than investing in our children by making sure they have a quality education. In celebrating National Charter Schools Week, we recognize the principle in highlighting many accomplishments of charter schools around the country.

Charter schools are public schools that are given flexibility and independence in exchange for being held accountable for improving student achievement and for their financial operations. They provide a different and unique model for public schools with new, innovative programming and smaller class sizes without so much red tape. Unlike vouchers, charter schools do not take money from public schools because the public funds remain in the public school system.

In 1994, there were less than a dozen charter schools in America. Today there are more

than 2,150 charter schools across the nation. Currently, 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have passed laws authorizing charter schools. Although in my home state of Maryland, the General Assembly again failed to pass legislation authorizing the establishment of public charter schools, I am pleased that Baltimore City has a few schools similar to charter schools. My daughter attends one of these schools in Baltimore City.

As the national debate on how to improve our public schools continues, we must do all we can to hire more teachers, reduce class size, modernize our nation's public school, put computers in every classroom, and encourage parental involvement. Supporting the creation of charter public schools is one concept that will help improve public schools because charter schools pressure the more traditional public schools to continue to strive for excellence.

As this body considers various education initiatives, such as ESEA, and education funding, let us be committed to supporting creative solutions, such as public charter schools, while ensuring that we maintain quality education for all of our nation's youth.

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, in honor of National Charter Schools Week, I rise in strong support of H. Con. Res. 95.

This weeklong celebration, which started yesterday and runs through Friday, is co-sponsored by more than seventy grassroots charter support organizations and is coordinated by the Charter Friends National Network.

Although a relatively new phenomenon, charter schools have been at the cutting edge of educational reform for the past several years.

In exchange for flexibility and freedom from regulations, charter schools are held accountable for improving the academic performance of their students. This newfound flexibility and freedom has not only translated into higher test scores, but also innovative practices. It has empowered parents with the ability to seek out the best education possible for their children.

In fact, we have done our best to mirror these same principles of freedom, flexibility and accountability throughout the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in H.R. 1, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which we are marking up in committee tomorrow.

Currently, 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have passed charter school laws and more than a half million students attend charter public schools nationwide. My hope is that one day, in the not so distant future, every state will have passed a charter school law.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the students, parents, teachers, principals and administrators who have embraced the charter school movement. I would also like to thank Mr. TANCREDO, Mr. KELLER, and Mr. ROEMER for their efforts in bringing this important resolution to the House floor.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of this resolution that recognizes the charter school movement for its contribution to improving our Nation's public school system.

I have been a strong supporter of the charter school movement since 1992 when former Representatives Penny and McCurdy and I introduced the Public School Redefinition Act of 1992. That bill was based on legislation introduced the year before by Senators Duren-

berger of Minnesota and LIEBERMAN of Connecticut. This was the very beginning of Congressional efforts to encourage charter schools.

I am happy to say that the bipartisan efforts of a handful of dedicated individuals resulted in the subsequent creation by Congress of a federal Public Charter Schools program in 1994.

Later, the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998 revised the Public Charter Schools statute by, among other things, increasing its authorization and giving priority for grants to states providing charter schools with financial autonomy.

The charter school movement, we should note, is a true grassroots movement. This movement was started in the early 1990s by concerned parents and frustrated teachers who were tired of the status quo, tired of fighting the bureaucracy that smothers innovation, and tired of seeing their children sink into mediocrity and failure.

It is therefore important to keep in mind that Congress should try to avoid imposing federally prescribed requirements such as teacher certification.

According to the Charter Friends National Network, "More than two-thirds of the states—with more than 80% of the charters—currently have some degree of flexibility in allowing use of teacher qualifications other than traditional certification." Any attempt to apply a teacher certification mandate to charter schools would jeopardize their very nature, which is based on autonomy in exchange for academic achievement.

In my state of Wisconsin, I am proud to say that we have a strong charter school and school choice program—especially in the city of Milwaukee where we have the support of education-reform minded individuals such as former school superintendent Howard Fuller and Mayor John Norquist.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that charter schools work. They work because they are freed from burdensome regulations, and in return, they are held accountable for academic results.

I want to commend the gentleman from Colorado, Representative TANCREDO, for introducing this resolution. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of this measure, and I urge my colleagues to support and promote a National Charter Schools Week.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support and recognition of Charter schools. Charter schools, which are public schools authorized by a designated public body, were established with the goal to enhance school organization and instruction. Charter schools operate on the principles of accountability, parent flexibility, choice, and autonomy.

Charter schools provide an invaluable means of improving student achievement for all who are enrolled in them. Charter public schools are held to highest standards and act as a vehicle for stimulating positive change and improvement in all public schools. As a member of the House Education and Workforce Committee, I am committed to fighting for improvement in our Nation's education system and charter schools have the ability to enhance the quality of education for all public school students.

There are 36 States, along with the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico that have passed laws authorizing

charter school. My home state of Wisconsin currently supports 95 charter schools, educating 7,210 students. There are over 550,000 students enrolled in 2,150 charter schools nationwide. Not only is education a top priority, but it is the key to a successful future. These schools are providing an excellent education for the American youth.

Many charter schools serve significant numbers of students with lower income minority students, and students with disabilities. A charter school does not and cannot discriminate against any student. The contract for the schools is required to explain how the school will achieve a racial and ethnic balance among its pupils that reflects the school district population.

Charter schools have the unique ability and freedom of setting up their own governance and administrative structures. Many of the schools create decision-making boards that include some or all of a school's teachers, while others have parent-teacher committees to address various school needs. Some schools have students playing a vital role in their governing bodies.

Over the years, charter schools have received significant bipartisan support from the Administration, the Congress, State governors and legislators, educators, and parents throughout the Nation because the schools have been effectively educating their students. A good education is invaluable to any student and we have the responsibility to provide every child with the opportunity to learn. The Nation should take a week to honor the model education system set up by the charter schools.

Mr. COSTELLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Con. Res. 95. I am proud to acknowledge and commend the charter school movement for its contribution to improving out nation's public school system. A charter education is a special and rigorous public education for more than 500,000 children nationwide. Charter schools serve a broad range of students, many of which better meet the needs of students than conventional schools. Charter schools exercise increased autonomy in return for increased accountability. They are accountable for both academic results and fiscal practices to their sponsors, their parents, and the public.

The charter schools in my district, Syzygy Charter School, Visional Academy Charter School, Tomorrow's Builders Charter School, and Fort Bowman Academy Charter School, increase opportunities for learning and access to quality education for all students, create choice for parents and students within the public school system, encourage innovative teaching practices, and encourage community and parent involvement in public education.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to establish a National Charter School Week. The charter schools in my district and nationwide demonstrate impressive levels of achievement and accomplishment, and I commend them for their continued dedication to serve. For these reasons, I support this legislation.

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LINDER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida

(Mr. KELLER) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 95, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 1467

Mr. OTTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 1467.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Idaho?

There was no objection.

RECOGNIZING 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF 4-H PROGRAM

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 112) recognizing the upcoming 100th anniversary of the 4-H Youth Development Program and commending such program for service to the youth of the world.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 112

Whereas the 4-H Youth Development Program celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2002;

Whereas the 4-H Youth Development program sponsors clubs in rural and urban areas throughout the world;

Whereas the 4-H Clubs have grown to over 5.6 million annual participants ranging from 5 to 19 years of age;

Whereas today's 4-H Clubs are very diverse, offering agricultural, career development, information technology, and general life skills programs; and

Whereas the 4-H Youth Development Program continues to make great contributions toward the development of well-rounded youth: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives recognizes the upcoming 100th anniversary of the 4-H Youth Development Program and commends such program for service to the youth of the world.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER) and the gentleman from Hawaii (Mrs. MINK) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 112.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Res. 112, which extends the recognition of this body to the 4-H Youth Development Program on the occasion of its 100th anniversary of its creation next year.

The 4-H is the original "learning by doing," and like all great ideas in education, it originated at the local level as the product of local educators and concerned citizens who saw a way to improve agricultural education.

4-H participants pledged their heads to clear thinking, their hearts to greater loyalty, their hands to greater service and their health to better living for their clubs, their communities, their country, and their world, not a bad code by which to live.

Even before Congress began supporting land-grant extension programs that took the agricultural advances of academia into working farms, 4-H understood the value of putting ideas into action.

□ 1545

It is at the heart of this organization.

From its roots in agricultural education, food preservation, and nature study, 4-H has spread to include training in a variety of areas, more than 110 areas, in fact. These areas include the arts, environmental education, communication, science and technology, and healthy life-style education. With new programs, 4-H has continued to help more and more young people learn skills to succeed later in life and become positive contributing leaders. Today, only 10 percent of participating youth live on farms. In fact, 30 percent are minorities. More than 6.5 million youth are members. Some of the well-known former 4-H members are Johnny Carson, Faith Hill, Reba McEntyre, and Dolly Parton.

The leadership skills 4-H members develop, the practical knowledge they accumulate in the programs they study, the friendships they build, and the experiences they have in competition and problem-solving make them better people and make our country a better place.

Earlier this year, my family and I had the happy privilege of visiting with several 4-H'ers at the Florida State Fair in Tampa and the Orange County Fair in Orlando, Florida. These young people had prepared several impressive agricultural exhibits, and they were also very knowledgeable about the cows and the pigs and other livestock they had raised. These 4-H members made quite a positive impression on my two young children.

In a changing world, I am very glad that 4-H has been there for America's young people and has continued to grow with them. 4-H helps to prepare them for the challenges they continue to face and help America to continue to be the place where the ideas and beliefs that made it great are still taught and practiced.

Congratulations 4-H on 100 years of success and service, and best wishes for 100 more.