

THE EDUCATION, ACHIEVEMENT,
AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 5, 2002

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation designed to ensure the federal government appropriately assists parents with the financial burdens associated with their child's education. The legislation gives parents more options, and helps them as they search out the best educational setting and tools for their children.

To this end, the Education, Achievement, and Opportunity Act will provide refundable tuition tax credits per year, per child, for educational expenses incurred by parents for elementary and secondary school. The legislation would allow parents sending their child to an elementary school up to \$2,500 in tax relief, and parents with children in a Catholic or parochial high school could claim up to \$3,500 in assistance.

Parents who send their child to a Catholic school already pay twice for their child's education: once through their taxes, and a second time for the tuition. These out-of-pocket expenses can really add up and pose an enormous obstacle to the child's lifetime learning opportunities. Without federal support, many parents struggle—and in some cases forgo—a Catholic school education, or any education in a spiritual setting, because the costs are so high.

In my own district in New Jersey, a parent who feels Catholic schools are best suited for their child will pay somewhere between \$1,840 and \$2,566 in tuition costs. If you want to send your child to a parochial high school in the central New Jersey area, a parent is looking at an average tuition bill of \$5,571 per student, per year. In other areas of the country, the costs are very similar.

Middle-class and lower-income families just cannot—and should not have to—absorb these kinds of costs without some help or recognition from the government. America's children have unique educational needs and goals, and parents are the ones who are best qualified to decide what's in their child's best interest. It just isn't fair to deny a child the ability to pursue the educational program best suited to his/her needs simply because the child's parents do not have the resources to afford the education program of their choice.

We have 59,000,000 youngsters in elementary and secondary school across the U.S.; about 10 percent of these students are enrolled in private, parochial and rabbinical schools. Those families who are already sending their children to such schools, and others planning to send their children to them, would benefit enormously from this proposal, because they are often struggling to make ends meet.

Importantly, my education proposal is a tax credit, rather than a voucher, so the total amount of education resources available for all school age children will increase. Under a voucher system, if a school loses enrolled students to a competing school, that school may lose funding and have fewer resources available for their educational program. Under my plan, that outcome is avoided, because it is a "win-win" scenario, whereas voucher pro-

grams can become a zero-sum situation with "winners and losers."

I was very pleased that President Bush's \$1.35 trillion tax cut reform legislation—The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, now P.L. 107-16 included several child and family tax credits to help individuals with their educational priorities. The Bush Tax Cut was a solid down payment to help parents meet the educational needs of their children. Parents can now save up to \$2,000 per year in their Education Savings Accounts, and the interest that builds up in them is tax free. When the parent withdraws money for elementary or secondary school expenses, the withdrawal is excluded from their taxable income.

If we are to truly make good on our promise that "no child is left behind," we must ensure that Catholic schools are included in this national promise and goal. A child is a child, regardless of what school system they are enrolled. The children enrolled in Catholic, private, and rabbinical schools deserve nothing less than our full support and compassion.

The benefits of my legislation are available to any child, no matter what their race, creed, or national origin. And make no mistake: the public school system will continue to remain the backbone of our nation's education system. But we must never forget that the public school system was created to serve students—not the other way around. If a student is performing poorly at a particular school, a parent should have the opportunity to enroll the child in another appropriate setting which has a better chance to meet the child's needs.

I urge my colleagues to support the Education, Achievement, and Opportunity Act.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO JOE WAGNER

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 5, 2002

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize an outstanding civic and economic leader from the State of Colorado. Joe Wagner of Denver, Colorado has been actively involved in improving citizens lives through his many activities in the region. He is the founder and operator of one of the state's most successful businesses, Wagner Equipment Co, and is a well known activist and leader in many community activities. As he celebrates his induction into the Colorado Business Hall of Fame, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the many achievements and incredible dedication that have led to this extraordinary honor.

Joe founded Wagner Equipment Co., a Caterpillar tractor dealer, in 1976 after gaining experience as a senior manger for a similar operation in North Texas. His desire to begin a business of his own led Joe to Colorado, where his business today thrives after 25 years of dedicated service to his community. As a result of this success, the company is now the Caterpillar dealer for the state, enjoying over 20 locations in Colorado and internationally in Mongolia and Siberia. Wagner equipment employs over 900 workers who serve customers in mining, agriculture, forestry, power generation, construction, manufacturing, and government, as well as sup-

plying quality Caterpillar products to consumers.

Joe's success in business is one, but not the only, reason for his selection as a recipient of this award. Part of the award is based on commitment to the community and giving back to those who have supported you and allowed for your success. In this endeavor, Joe has been a valuable participant. He has been active helping Colorado's youth in the Denver Area Council Boy Scouts, the Denver Boys & Girls Club, Children's Hospital and the Children's Hospital Foundation. As a local businessman, he plays an active role in the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and as a board member for Wells Fargo Bank. He also remains an active member of his church as an elder with Presbyterian Church of the Covenant.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to bring forth before this body of Congress the names of individuals who have done so much for Colorado communities. Joe Wagner has been an active civic, business, and religious leader and patron for Colorado. I would like to further extend my congratulations on the award and thank him for all his efforts in improving his fellow Coloradoan's lives. Congratulations Joe, and good luck in your future endeavors.

IN HONOR OF JANET SARINGER

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 5, 2002

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a truly remarkable woman, one who genuinely exemplifies what it means to be a respected civil servant and community activist.

Janet Saringer has dedicated her life to public service and to the North Olmsted community. She has actively participated in public service since 1971 when she was elected to city Council Ward 2. She has served as ward Councilwoman, council member-at-large, and president of council pr-tem. For the past 8 years she has served as President of the Council chairing and serving on seven committees of Council. She will be truly missed as she begins her retirement after 25 years of devoted service as Department Head of the Cuyahoga County Recorders Office.

Janet has volunteered her time in the community and touched the lives of many people in the area. As a graduate of St. Augustine Academy, she has served as the alumnae association president. She also acted as president of the Greater Cleveland Suburban Council and the Stoneybrook Women's Club. She has been active on the North Olmsted Community Council as well as the North Olmsted Democratic Club and the Cuyahoga County Democratic Executive Committee. Her involvement has also benefited the Irish American community as a member of the West Side IA Club, IPAC and the IACREOT.

Janet continues to live a fulfilling and active life. Janet has been a committed wife who was recently widowed after 35 years of marriage to Robert N. Saringer, a Cleveland Police Officer. She has also been a wonderful mother of five children, Jack, Debbie, Janet, Bob and Bill. She is a grandmother to 12 children and a great grandmother to three children with one on the way. Janet is loved by