

Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise in recognition of an important week for my community, but also for our Nation as a whole.

This is the 40th annual Catholic Schools Week, and it is a time to recognize the importance of parochial education on the fabric of our community and our country. This year's theme truly encapsulates the critical mission of Catholic schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge, and Service. These are important things to teach our children.

Yesterday, I was happy to be able to stop by St. Mark's School in historic Bristol, Bucks County, and meet with schoolchildren there. St. Mark's School has been providing a top-rate education for Bucks County families for over 125 years, and, like all Catholic schools, their connection to their community is deep and vital.

Parents are involved at the school. They were there at the school when I arrived, running a book fair for the students. The teachers sacrifice greatly for the children, as do the families make sacrifices to send their children to St. Mark's and to other Catholic schools throughout our country.

As a Catholic school graduate, the husband of a Catholic school teacher, and a parent also, I understand how important it is to draw attention to the academic, the faith development, and the community service excellence performed year-round in Catholic schools.

Mr. Speaker, there are few things more important to a parent than the success of our children in and out of the classroom. One of the most important decisions a parent makes is the school that will educate their children.

National Catholic Schools Week is a time to recognize the importance of school choice for families looking to increase access to opportunity and the American Dream for future generations, and also to say thank you to the parishes and schools that serve our children this week and every week.

HONORING FALLEN TOLEDO FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, tonight, the President will deliver his State of the Union address to the Nation. Our Nation is great because of the patriotism, strength, and self-sacrifice of our people.

In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give honor to two fallen Toledo firefighters, Stephen Machcinski and James Dickman.

Mr. Machcinski is survived by his parents, sister, and brother. Mr. Dickman is survived by his wife, 3-year-old daughter, 1-month-old son, and parents.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of these brave men. These

heroes responded to a two-story apartment building fire where people were reported inside. Toledo Mayor Michael Collins said it best:

The average person would run in the opposite direction than they do, but that is their profession.

As we all go about our busy lives every day, we often fail to recognize that we likely owe our way of life to someone else because of their sacrifice. Firefighters, police officers, and other emergency and law enforcement personnel put their lives on the line for us every single day. We should all take a moment every now and then to say thank you to these extraordinary citizens.

Our hearts go out to the families who lost such brave and generous loved ones. May they be comforted with the knowledge that Stephen and James died in a noble profession founded to protect and serve our people and our Republic. They accomplished their mission for our city. We are forever indebted to them, and are flying flags over this Capitol today in their memory.

CALLING FOR AN END TO VIOLENCE IN UKRAINE

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I want to reference as well this morning the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Sixty-five years after the ratification of this most important document, police in Ukraine continue to brutally fend off protesters and journalists, who have been demonstrating for over 2 months in the bitter cold for their human rights and democratic freedoms. We know there have been countless injuries, and now, sadly, there have been five deaths.

Kiev, a beautiful and historic city, now resembles a war zone, covered with ash and burning fires. The situation in Ukraine grows more dire everyday, and we in Congress have the responsibility to stand with Ukraine's freedom marchers.

I call on our fellow Members to support the passage of H. Res. 447, which supports the democratic aspirations of the people of Ukraine and calls for condemnation of the regime's undemocratic practices. We implore President Yanukovich and the opposition leaders to advance the cause of freedom for all the people of Ukraine.

Last evening, Ukraine's parliament rightly repealed its early passage of the anti-free assembly laws, and its prime minister resigned. These are hopeful signs to calm the unrest.

As we gather this evening to learn about the state of our own Union, let us not forget the state of our trusted allies around the world. I ask President Obama to please draw attention to the economic and political crisis in Ukraine here tonight.

No more blood should be shed in Ukraine. The world community looks to Ukraine to live up to the magnifi-

cent nation she can be, linking East and West, North and South. Her potential is unlimited.

Ukraine's people, who have suffered so much, not just currently, but over the last century, are owed their most deserved day in the sun. History's clock is ticking. May God be with them.

□ 1030

MASSACHUSETTS SNAP RECIPIENTS WILL BE HARMED BY FARM BILL HEAT AND EAT CUTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we will be voting on a 950-page-plus bill that no one has read. This is a bill, the farm bill, which was first made available to us late last evening.

To make matters even worse, Mr. Speaker, we are told that we will only have 1 hour of debate on this bill, and we are not even to have a rule on the bill. We are going to have a rule that incorporates the farm bill with an abortion bill. What they have to do with one another, I have no idea.

But it is clear what is going on here, and that is that the leadership of this House does not want anyone to know what is in that bill. One of the things that is in that bill, which I find reprehensible, is an \$8.6 billion cut in the SNAP program.

The SNAP program exists to make sure that people in this country do not go hungry. On November 1, last November 1, a cut of \$11 billion went into effect. The recovery moneys ran out. Congress did not renew them, so everybody on SNAP, all 47 million people, received a cut.

Food prices didn't go down. The economy hasn't gotten much better, but their food benefit went down. And their benefit is, on average, about \$1.40 a meal per day. So those who think that this is some sort of generous benefit have no idea what they are talking about.

So we cut their benefit; and they are now ending up spending more time at food banks and food pantries, looking for ways to put food on their table so that their kids don't go hungry; and we bring a farm bill to the floor that cuts that program by another \$8.6 billion.

Now, supporters of the farm bill say, well, really it could have been a lot worse. You should just be happy it is \$8.6 billion. You should declare victory.

Well, those people who are going to be adversely impacted by that \$8.6 billion cut don't feel a lot of victory.

Yes, it is targeted. It is targeted at those individuals who are on this so-called "Heat and Eat" program. These are poor people who get a little bump up in their benefit to put food on their table, mostly elderly people, mostly disabled people.

So we are going to go tell them that they are going to get significantly less

a month in a food benefit, but the good news for them is there will be some that won't be adversely impacted. They should take some satisfaction in that.

We talk about numbers all the time. We talk about statistics. Let me read to you a couple of real life examples.

William, an elderly man from Salem, Massachusetts, currently receives \$181 a month in SNAP. He lives in senior housing, where heat and utilities are included, but the rent exceeds 35 percent of his \$802 a month supplemental Social Security income.

His SNAP benefit of \$181 a month is based on the Heat and Eat option. He incurs other health-related expenses not covered by Medicaid, but he has had significant difficulty producing the detailed verification required by the State.

His current SNAP would be significantly reduced by more than \$80 a month if he lost this Heat and Eat option.

Pamela, a severely disabled woman from Northborough, Massachusetts, currently receives \$115 a month as SNAP benefits. She gets \$1,007 in monthly Social Security disability benefits. In addition to other medical conditions, she is a diabetic and requires a special diet to meet her daily nutritional needs.

While she lives in public housing, she must pay for her own appliances and maintenance fees, including her air conditioning unit, essential to her health. She does not have a car, but uses her limited income for private transportation to medical appointments, grocery shopping and pharmacy trips, as she is not near any public transportation.

With the loss of the Heat and Eat SNAP option, her SNAP benefit will be reduced by \$100 a month, so from \$115 to the minimum of \$15 a month, significantly impacting her ability to maintain her special diet.

Let me say to my colleagues here, the cut that went into effect last November will cost the average family of three about \$30 a month in benefits. Those who will be impacted by the cuts of this Heat and Eat program will lose an additional \$80 to \$90 a month. So their reduction in their monthly benefit for food should be between \$120 and \$130 a month.

Where are they going to find the food?

Who is going to make up the difference?

My colleagues on the Republican side say, well, they can go beg to the States; the States ought to do more; or if the States say no, go to the churches or the synagogues or the mosques. Maybe they will do more.

The bottom line is, if any of my colleagues took the time to go back to their districts and visit their food banks, they would realize they are at capacity. Food banks can't give out any more.

So I would urge my colleagues, vote against this farm bill. Do not make hunger worse in America.

NATIONAL SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, for the past 40 years, my work in this House has been guided by my firm belief that every child, regardless of his or her ZIP code, deserves access to a quality education that will prepare them for future success; and every parent deserves to know that their child's school is helping their son or daughter achieve his or her full potential.

That is why, under No Child Left Behind, we demanded the accountability include transparency on school performance. We share the collective responsibility, at all levels of government, to make good on the promise of high-quality education for all students. Unfortunately, we all know that not every school is living up to that promise.

When any school fails its students, it is our responsibility, not only to give those students a high-quality public school option, but to also improve the low-performing schools. It is simple: no child should be stuck in a failing school.

This week is National School Choice Week. Many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and their strategists have embraced the so-called "school choice" as a part of their rebranding effort to appear more caring.

Politico reported just last week that the Republican strategists have been counseling the Republicans that talking about helping poor minority children softens the Republican image. Talking about it, not doing something about it.

Conservative advocacy groups have declared in planning documents that it is an excellent media opportunity to focus on kids and the future. It is a media opportunity to focus on children, not to do something about it.

This new effort even has a warm and fuzzy name, the Growth and Opportunity Project. This is political posturing at its worst, and it does nothing to provide actual choice for our Nation's students.

The cornerstone of true school choice is the principle that every child has the right to attend a great school. Not only should the students have high-quality options, but we need to demand that low-performing schools improve, and support that improvement.

Without quality schools to pick from, families face an empty choice. Yet that is all the Republican majority has offered Americans so far.

Neither school choice nor quality of schools was on their agenda when they voted for the Republican rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. That bill abandoned our responsibility to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education. It undercut Federal support for schools.

The majority leader pledged that Republicans remain vigilant in protecting

and promoting school choice; yet their bill removed the school choice mechanisms that were already in current law. And their bill failed to require that schools in districts improve when they are failing to effectively educate students.

With the Republicans' Elementary and Secondary Education bill, along with sequestration, the majority turned its back on the Nation's most vulnerable students. They took money away from America's poorest schools, and they took money away from America's poorest students.

The very people that the majority's school choice media opportunity pretends to support are the same ones that are hurt by the majority's actual votes in this Chamber. Not a media conversation, not the posturing to appear to soften the image, but the actual votes taken in this Chamber harm the very children that they now say they want to support with this media opportunity to soften their image.

It was the Democratic Elementary and Secondary Education bill that held schools accountable for improvement and demanded that children be afforded new education opportunities when stuck in a failing school.

School choice should not be an empty promise. It should not be a political tag line that frees my colleagues from taking responsibility for our Nation's education system.

Mr. Speaker, if you want meaningful school choice, you must demand schools be held accountable for equitably serving all students, and you must provide the support that the schools need to provide that quality education.

Without that accountability for school quality, what choices would parents really have when their schools are failing?

An option between two low-performing schools? Not a good option.

An option between low-performing neighborhood schools and figuring out how to get your child across town to a different school, providing the transportation, and still hold down the job, that is not a fair option.

What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that if you ask parents all across America, they will tell you that their first choice in school choice is to have a neighborhood school that is high-performing; have a neighborhood school that meets the demands of that family and those children to get a first-class education; not to drive across town; not to spend time putting their kids in transit or putting their kids in harm's way trying to walk to that better school.

Fix the neighborhood schools; and if you don't, then provide that child the alternative to go to another school, as we did in current law, not as we do in the media release.

I challenge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to go beyond the rhetoric and posturing and sit down with me and others to make real, sustainable improvements in public education for all students.