September 12, 2000

LITERACY INVOLVES FAMILIES TOGETHER ACT

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[Page: H7468]

- Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to explain why Congress should reject the Literacy Involves Families Together (LIFT) Act (House Resolution 3222), which aims to increase `family literacy' by directing money from the American taxpayer to Washington and funneling a small percentage of it back to the states and localities to spend on education programs that meet the specifications of DC-based bureaucrats. While all support the goal of promoting adult literacy, especially among parents with young children, Congress should not endorse supporting the unconstitutional and ineffective means included in this bill. If Congress were serious about meaningful education reform, we would not even be debating bills like H.R. 3222. Rather, we would be discussing the best way to return control over the education dollar to the people so they can develop the education programs that best suit their needs.

- Several of my colleagues on the Education and Workforce Committee have expressed

opposition to the LIFT Act's dramatic increase in authorized expenditures for the Even Start family literacy programs. Of course, I share their opposition to the increased expenditure, however, my opposition to this bill is based not as much on the authorized amount but on the bill's underlaying premise: that the American people either cannot or will not provide educational services to those who need them unless they are forced to do so by the federal government.

- In contrast to the drafters of the LIFT bill, I do not trust the Congress to develop an education program that can match the needs of every community in the United States. Instead, I trust the American people to provide the type of education system that best suits their needs, and the needs of their fellow citizens, provided Congress gives them back control over the education dollar.

- The drafters of the United States Constitution understood that the federal government was incapable of effectively providing services such as education. This is why they carefully limited the federal government's powers to a few narrowly defined areas. This understanding of the proper role of the federal government was reinforced by the tenth amendment which forbids the Federal Government from controlling education, instead leaving authority over education in the hands of states, local communities and parents.

- Reinforcing that the scariest words in the English language are `I'm from the federal government and I am here to help you,' the American education system has deteriorated in the years since Congress disregarded the constitutional limitations on centralizing education in order to `improve the schools.' One could argue that if the federally-controlled schools did a better job of educating children to read, perhaps there would not be a great demand for `adult literacy programs!'

- Of course, family literacy programs do serve a vital purpose in society, but I would suggest that not only would family literacy programs exist, they would better serve those families in need of assistance if they were not controlled by the federal government. Because of the generosity of the American people, the issue is not whether family literacy programs will be funded but who should control the education dollars; the American people or the federal government?

- Mr. Speaker, rather than give more control over education to the people, H.R. 3222 actually further centralizes education by attaching new requirements to those communities receiving taxpayer dollars for adult literacy programs. For example, under this bill, federally-funded Even Start programs must use instruction methods based on `scientific research.' While none question the value of research into various educational methodologies, it is doubtful that the best way to teach reading can be totally determined through laboratory experiments. Learning to read is a complex process, involving many variables, not the least of which are the skills and abilities of the individual.

- Many effective techniques may not be readily supported by `scientific research.' Therefore, this program may end up preventing the use of many effective means of reading instruction. The requirement that recipients of federal funds use only those reading techniques based on `scientific research,' (which in practice means those methods approved by the federally-funded `experts') ensures that a limited number of reading methodologies will, in essence, be `stamped with federal approval.'

- In addition to violating the United States Constitution, the LIFT bill raises some serious questions regarding the relationship between the state and the family. Promoting family literacy is a noble goal but programs such as these may promote undue governmental interference in family life. Many people around the country have expressed concern that `parenting improvement' programs have become excuses for the government bureaucrats to intimidate parents into ceding effective control over child-rearing to the government. While none of these complaints are directly related to the Even Start program Even Start does rest on the premise that it is legitimate for the federal government to interfere with the parent-child relationship to `improve' parenting. Once one accepts that premise, it is a short jump to interfering in all

aspects of family life in order to promote the federal government's vision of `quality parenting.'

- In order to give control over education back to the American people, I have introduced several pieces of legislation that improve education by giving the American people control over their education dollar. For instance my Family Education Freedom Act (H.R. 935), provides parents with a $3,000 per child tax credit for K-12 education expenses incurred in sending their children to public, private, or home school. I have also introduced the Education Improvement Tax Cut Act (H.R. 936), which provides a tax donation of up to $3,000 for cash or in-kind donations to public or private schools as well as for donations to elementary and secondary scholarships. I am also cosponsoring legislation (H.R. 969) to increase the tax donations for charitable contributions, as well as several bills to provide tax credits for adult job training and education.

- Unleashing the charitable impulses of the American people is the most effective means of ensuring that all Americans have access to the quality education programs they need, and to make sure that those programs are tailored to meet the particular needs of the local communities and the individuals they serve.

- In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I call on my colleagues to reject the LIFT Act and instead embrace a program of education and charitable tax credits that will give the American people the ability to provide for the education needs of their children and families in the way that best suits the unique circumstances of their own communities.