

Mr. Chairman, Head Start is a program with many success stories, providing more than 900,000 low-income children with comprehensive educational, medical, dental, and nutritional services. It is an investment in our future. I am happy to see some improvement offered in the School Readiness Act of 2005, such as abandoning block-granting, increasing accountability on academic performance and content, and teacher quality. Unfortunately, this bill falls short of the expectations set by my local community and I cannot support it.

It does not go far enough in providing additional funding for teachers so they may acquire bachelor's degrees by 2011. In Oregon, only 58 percent of the eligible children are being served. Instead of focusing on getting more eligible children into the program, the Republican Leadership is once again attempting to repeal civil rights protections by introducing an amendment permitting religious organizations to use federal funds to discriminate in hiring and firing decisions. Faith-based organizations have long participated in the Head Start program and have successfully received federal funding without discriminating.

Head Start is a bright light for families and children who need an extra boost into the future. It is a program that demonstrates that we care about all families within our communities. I cannot support a bill that discriminates and ignores equality protections.