

Mr. Speaker, the goal of those of us here in Congress should be to be a full partner for the American people, who really care about the essentials. They want their children to be safe when they go out the door to school in the morning, they are concerned about the family's economic security, and they want them to be healthy, physically and environmentally.

This well-being of our families depends upon the health of our schools. There are some in Congress who would turn their back upon the historic responsibility that the Federal Government has had with education, claiming that this is exclusively a State or a local responsibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Federal Government has always played a major role in education, starting from the Land Ordinance Act of 1785 through the GI bill to school lunches today.

There are three critical areas that we must address here in this Congress: assistance for the children who are the most difficult and expensive to educate; the reduction of gun violence, so that families can have peace of mind when the children go to school; and the promotion of computer skills and access that are so essential for success in today's world.

Congress mandated, appropriately so, in the 94th Congress that there would be special education access for children with severe learning disabilities, but along with that mandate came a promise of 40 percent funding from the Federal Government, appropriately, for these children are the most difficult and expensive to educate. Yet, we are contemplating only 9 percent Federal funding in place of that 40 percent commitment.

In the area of gun safety, we have seen example after example across this country where carnage has erupted on our schoolyards. Yet, at the same time, this Congress has a number of bills before it that are designed to reduce the incidence of gun violence. So far, not one has been scheduled to come to this floor.

Finally, in the area of Internet connection, that promise was to be made through the mechanism of the E-Rate, a heavily discounted fee that would be available particularly to inner city schools, rural schools, but all American schools and libraries would benefit, to some degree. This was the promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and yet this promise has yet to be fully implemented. Indeed, today there are some in Congress who are threatening to repeal that provision, leaving behind the most needy children from the information superhighway.

The Importance of America's Schools and Libraries

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There is no reason for us to shrug our shoulders, no excuse for inaction. We know the problems. We in Congress have made the commitments. We currently have the strongest economy of a generation. Indeed, some of my friends in the Republican leadership feel we have so much money that they feel comfortable contemplating a \$1 trillion tax cut over the next 10 years.

I would suggest that, first and foremost, we tend to knitting by first fully funding our commitment to special education; by passing commonsense legislation to reduce gun access, the cap laws that would mandate safe storage and responsible gun ownership; and finally, keep our commitments to our schools and libraries by fully funding the E-Rate. Americans and their children deserve no less from this Congress.