

the United States Government has brought about important protection and restoration of limited resources on a small island, like Puerto Rico, with a high population density.

Last year, thanks to the support of my colleagues, I was able to designate portions of three rivers in Puerto Rico as wild and scenic. Soon I will introduce legislation that will protect, through a partnership between the Federal Government and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, critical water resources in the karst region of Puerto Rico. Furthermore, I will also introduce legislation to designate the El Toro Wilderness Area in the Caribbean National Forest, known in Puerto Rico as El Yunque. These efforts, I am proud to say, are of the spirit and dedication of Francisco Javier Blanco.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for the Chair's consideration in these endeavors, and hope to work with the bipartisan support in Congress to enact these bills into law.

THE PRESIDENT'S HEAD START PROPOSAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ADERHOLT). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk briefly about the President's budget for 2004. One of the specific areas is the area of Head Start.

The President's budget introduced this new Head Start initiative and wages a war on the poor. The Head Start has been working great, despite the fact that we only have funds to represent and only give to about 40 percent of Americans that are out there that are in need. Yet he is choosing to take these resources and decided to put it on the block grant, when right now, on the local control basis, it has been working in a way, and all the studies indicate that the Head Start has been doing a great job.

The administration claims that his proposal will sharpen the focus on school readiness, improve teacher training and mandate a system to assess the success of Head Start programs in preparing children for school. The reality is it is already doing that. Why mess with it? It is a great program.

The intent is to send the money to the States. The reason we started the Head Start program is because the States have been negligent in providing early childhood education. The States have not been responsive in putting in the resources, and I will give my colleagues an example.

Texas, to this day, only funds half-day kindergartens. The rest of the local school districts have to come up with the local property tax in order to provide full-day kindergartens. So when we look at Head Start that has early childhood preparation, this is

where the resources need to be. They need to stay there. They have been doing a great job. Let us not mess with it.

In order to address what the administration suggests is uncoordinated efforts, he wants to give this to the Department of Health and Human Services, or take it away from that Department and give it to the Department of Education. The reason it has been with the Department of Health and Human Services is because Head Start is not only an educational program, but it has been there to reach out to the families of these youngsters and also work with them when it comes to the issue of health and providing that early education that is needed to help those parents also address those needs.

When we send that money to the Department of Education, I can already see they are going to be earmarking it to the existing programs that they have and not addressing the specific programs that this program was intended to do.

Under the President's plan, the transition would begin in 2004, and the Department of Education would assume full responsibilities for Head Start, and instead of having the local community do it, we would have 50 State agencies throughout this country with each State having the bureaucracy, and, of course, they would need 16 to 20 percent off the top in order to make that happen. Then they would be looking at providing those resources.

So we must ensure that Head Start continues to provide our children with comprehensive services and that it is strong for parental involvement and parental participation.

One of the key things that this program has resulted in is the studies show that those kids that show up at Head Start do a great deal better than the average youngster in the same category that is not under Head Start, and not only that, but they also found that they are less likely to drop out.

One of the realities is that youngsters who drop out, one of the characteristics is that they fail twice before they reach junior high, and one of the realities is that Head Start has helped them not to fall into that category of failing twice, and being able to get that, as the name implies, a head start in education.

One of the things that we do need to do is provide additional moneys for Head Start, because right now we are only providing 40 percent of those that are eligible to participate for this program, and there is a need for us to provide additional resources.

Besides trying to dismantle the Head Start program, the President also announced in his 2004 budget an increase of only \$148 million for Head Start. At the same time that he has identified education as one of his priorities, this is not sufficient money to be able to make this happen. Not only would this tiny increase not cover inflation and reach those kids that are needed in

Head Start, but it would also have to turn away over 1,200 children from the existing programs.

Questions must be asked as to the rationale for the initiative and for the transfer. Our concern is that we are transferring a program that has been working well under the Department of Health to another Department that has chosen not to address this problem, and who has chosen not to deal with early childhood education.

The President's 2004 budget proposal also includes legislative proposals to introduce an option available to all States to participate in alternative financing systems and in terms of grants, and so this initiative in terms of these grants are basically to take away from the existing program.

So I want to encourage the Members to really look closely at Head Start because it is a program that has been working. It is a program that has been there for us, and we need to keep that up.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 51 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Critical moments in the life of any person or any nation, as well as momentous undertakings, Lord God, bring us to our knees before You. We humbly seek Your guidance and rely on Your faithfulness. Be with us in the days and weeks ahead. Bless the Members of this Chamber, all who work here and our guests. Listen to our heartfelt prayers.

We seem to be entering a passageway of darkness which may fill us with fear and anxiety or move us forward with hope and expectation. Bring us safely to the light at the end of the tunnel. For Jews this may recall the Exodus; for Christians, cross and resurrection; for Muslims, a spiritual hijra. Only You, O Lord, can bring good out of evil and gift us with lasting peace; so we turn to You now and forever. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.