

this time and allowing me to participate in this discussion.

We know that children who begin kindergarten and first grade prepared both socially and mentally to learn have a much greater opportunity of success, not just in school but in life. Improving the quality of Head Start should be a priority for all of us.

One of the greatest challenges of any Federal program is to ensure that hard-earned taxpayer money is used only for the purpose intended, and the current Head Start program does not live up to that principle. The need for safeguards and accountability are needed now more than ever.

The School Readiness Act addresses financial management weaknesses found in the current Head Start system and publicly documented in various news accounts. There is disturbing evidence that a sizable share of Head Start funding never reaches its target: disadvantaged children. Instead, the money is being lost to waste, financial abuse, and mismanagement; and there are collective media accounts that suggest that the problem is not isolated.

The director of a Head Start program in Gardenville, Maryland, was indicted on charges that she stole more than \$350,000 from the organization over a 4-year period. Imagine if this money were spent on students rather than stolen from Head Start.

A former director of a Head Start program in Charleston, West Virginia, was sentenced up to 5 months in Federal prison after admitting he used an agency credit card for a personal trip to the Kentucky Derby and preparing a false invoice for computer repairs. Rather than investing money in student nutrition, this director took this money from school cafeterias and went to the horse races.

The executive director of the Kansas City, Missouri, Head Start operation earned a salary in excess of \$300,000 annually and drove a luxury SUV, leased in part with Federal Head Start funds. The gentleman has since resigned. Head Start was never intended to provide for six-figure salaries and luxury cars.

The Department of Justice gained a guilty plea from an executive director of a Lubbock, Texas, Head Start program after he embezzled more than \$800,000 over 2 years and diverted part of the money to a local restaurant.

Mr. Chairman, it is a priority of this Republican Congress to ensure that the necessary financial controls are in place to safeguard against these abuses and to protect the public's confidence in this important school readiness program. Safeguards against financial abuse in this bill include an independent financial audit annually, an annual report detailing how their money is spent and the sources of their funding, oversight by a local governance board, and a requirement that administrative costs may not exceed more than 15 percent of the total program cost.

Congress must not ignore the evidence that much money invested in the Head Start program currently never reaches the disadvantaged children it is intended to serve. I commend the chairman for his leadership and the leadership of the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE), for this bill; and I urge all Members of the House to support H.R. 2123.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND), a member of our subcommittee.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Chairman, the evidence of financial mismanagement is real, and I believe the committee has taken steps in this bill to try to address that, and this authorization bill goes a long way to do that. But as a member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, I have had the chance to visit all of my Head Start centers in western Wisconsin. You cannot help but walk away from that with an overwhelming feeling of pride and sense of security that those kids are receiving very professional, caring treatment in those Head Start centers.

Head Start has been one of the most successful anti-poverty programs ever created. It is also the most poked, prodded, picked, analyzed, and surveyed program in the Federal Government; and for the last 40 years it has withstood the test of time. It consistently ranks at the top of participant satisfaction surveys compared to any other Federal program.

I commend the leadership of the committee, the chairman, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER); and the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE); and the ranking members, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY), for putting together a good bipartisan bill that we were able to report out 48 to zero in committee, because there is a right and a wrong way to reauthorize this important program.

The right way is to enhance integrated services, increase accountability, tighten up the financial oversight, and require highly qualified teachers. A wrong way is to continue to leave behind over 400,000 students who currently qualify, but cannot go to Head Start because of inadequate resources. A wrong way is to allow the legal discrimination against an individual based on religion.

Later this afternoon, I will be offering my own amendment that would allow the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences to establish proper standards and assessments so we can properly measure the progress of these kids. The current national reporting system is not working well, and we need to make sure that we get the measurements and the testing of these children done correctly at this very early age so we do not do any harm. I will ask my colleagues to sup-

port my amendment when it comes up later.

Mr. Chairman, I join educators, parents, and Head Start staff from Wisconsin as well as many of my colleagues here today in support of reauthorizing Head Start. This program has helped millions of high-risk children from impoverished families achieve academic success.

Since the creation of Head Start 40 years ago, there has always been bipartisan consensus to continue this program that serves more than 13,000 children in Wisconsin and 2,000 in the Third Congressional District. As a member of the House Education and Workforce Committee, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to produce the best possible bill. I would like to thank Chairman BOEHNER, Representative CASTLE, Ranking Member MILLER, and Representative WOOLSEY for their leadership and commitment to our children in crafting this legislation.

I also would like to thank those people in western Wisconsin who have advised me throughout reauthorization. They include: Lori Dille, director of Southwest Wisconsin Head Start; Dan Stickler, director of Western Dairyland, Paula Wainscott, director of Head Start in Eau Claire Area School District; Tim Hathaway, director of Renewal Unlited, Sue Schultz, and Barbara Wehman at CESA 11; and James Vermeul, director of Child & Family Development Centers.

Since the reauthorization process began in the spring of 2003, we have made tremendous progress to reach consensus on the bill before us. However, I remain concerned with the implementation of the National Reporting System for Head Start children. The NRS is an assessment instrument developed under HHS's guidance in 2003 and used to test half a million children in Head Start twice yearly.

Unfortunately, HHS implemented NRS—at the cost of \$25 million so far—despite protests by early child education experts who question the validity, reliability, and appropriateness of the assessment. While we support ongoing assessments of Head Start children to help ensure their school readiness, these specific tests were developed behind closed doors and with very little input from child development experts, Congress, or Head Start centers.

The GAG validates many of these concerns. In May, they released a report stating: "If the test is to be used as a measure of program performance or to assess changes in child outcomes, it is important to ensure that it is sensitive to the range of development typically demonstrated in Head Start. Based on our analysis and that of the Technical Working Group and independent experts, we continue to believe that further study is necessary to ensure that the NRS results are reliable and valid and the results are appropriate for the intended purposes."

I authored language in H.R. 2123 to commission a study by the National Academy of Sciences to report on appropriate standards and benchmarks for school readiness and valid measures of assessment. Today, I will offer an amendment to suspend the National Reporting System until the National Academy of Sciences completes its review, and I urge all my colleagues to support my amendment.

Reauthorization provides Congress with an opportunity to evaluate appropriate standards and benchmarks for school readiness, as well