

(January 21, 2009) In Support of Catholic School's Week

Floor Statement - H. Res. 39

Representative Dan Lipinski

January 21, 2009

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 39, honoring National Catholic Schools Week and recognizing the outstanding contributions that Catholic schools have made to America.

As a product of St. Symphorosa Grammar School and St. Ignatius College Prep, and a strong supporter of Catholic education, I am proud to sponsor this resolution again this year. And I would like to thank my colleague from New Jersey, Mr. Smith, for working with me on the resolution.

Since 1974, Catholic Schools Week has celebrated the positive impact Catholic schools have had on our country and recognized their outstanding contributions in providing a strong academic and moral education, as well as teaching the importance of responsibility to one's family and community.

As we heard in President Obama's inauguration address yesterday, responsibility is critical to our nation's success, and responsibility requires service to others.

Very appropriately, the theme for next week's 35th Anniversary Catholic Schools Week is "Catholic Schools Celebrate Service." President Obama rightfully sees public service as a way to unify the country, to bridge divisions, and to teach responsible citizenship.

This is nothing new for America's Catholic schools; they have always taught the intrinsic value of service to others. Nearly 95 percent of Catholic schools have a service program and the average student completes approximately 80 hours of public service. My strong desire to serve was fostered by my dedicated teachers in Catholic schools.

Today, almost 2.3 million elementary and secondary students are enrolled in nearly 7,500 Catholic schools across the nation. These schools have more than 160,000 full-time professional staff. Through individual attention and quality instruction, Catholic school students - on average - surpass other students in math, science, and reading in the three grade levels tested by the NAEP test. The graduation rate for Catholic high school students is 99 percent, and 97 percent of Catholic high school graduates go on to college or technical schools. These are truly remarkable statistics in a country

where we read all-too-many reports of deep problems in our educational system and worrying declines in our students' international competitiveness.

Catholic schools are known for embracing students from all walks of life and are highly effective at providing excellent educational opportunities for minority students and disadvantaged youth. Almost one in seven students in Catholic schools is not Catholic. And, over the past 30 years, the percentage of minority students enrolled in Catholic schools has more than doubled. And the success of Catholic schools does not depend on selectivity, accepting nine out of every 10 students who apply.

In addition to producing well-educated students with a commitment to service, Catholic schools save American taxpayers billions of dollars every year by lessening the number of students in already-overburdened public schools. In fact, it is estimated that taxpayers save over \$1 billion from students attending Catholic schools in the Chicago area and approximately \$20 billion nationwide. This savings is crucial to all American taxpayers, especially during these harsh economic times.

Unfortunately, the current economic turmoil combined with the much longer travails of middle class families have been hard on Catholic schools in some areas. Just like me, my wife Judy attended Catholic schools for 12 years; she attended St. Patrick's Grade School and Bishop McCort High School in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, less than two weeks ago it was announced that St. Patrick's will be closing. This closing is a great loss to not just the students of St. Patrick's, but the entire community of Moxham, demonstrating just how important Catholic schools are to their communities.

I was born, raised, and live in the Chicago Archdiocese, which still has one of the most successful school systems in the country. More than 98,000 students attend 256 schools. In my district alone, there are seven Catholic high schools and approximately 50 grammar schools, including one of the best in my home parish of St. John of the Cross in Western Springs.

My experiences have taught me the important spiritual, moral, and intellectual foundation that Catholic schools provide to students. Catholic education has granted me the knowledge, discipline, desire to serve, and a love of learning that enabled me to earn my doctorate degree and become a teacher prior to being elected to Congress.

In recognizing Catholic Schools Week, we must pay special tribute to the dedicated teachers and administrators who sacrifice so much-in most cases working for much less than they could earn elsewhere. Many of my formative memories are of the teachers who taught me the values of faith and service. After 35 years, I still can fondly remember Sister Diane, my coach on the Student Congress Team in high school and my teachers at St. Symphorosa, from Sister Mildred in the first grade to Sister Xavier in the eighth grade. Throughout the United States, millions of others have similar memories of the dedicated sisters, priests, and lay teachers who gave their hearts and souls to touch the lives of their students.

Madam Speaker, America's Catholic schools deserve our praise, our support, and our gratitude. And to share our praise and support, I urge my colleagues to pass this resolution.

