

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the important issue of education. Obtaining an education is critical for today's youth. An individual's prosperity and quality of life will be directly affected by the education they receive.

We all know the phrase, "The more you learn, the more you earn." In addition to increased earnings, individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to be unemployed, less likely to need public assistance, and less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, today's communities will also benefit by increased education. Those communities will suffer lower crime rates, have fewer people on welfare, and will benefit from a better economy.

In fact, we have found that in this global economy, our competitive advantage is in education because we can't compete on wages. There are people in countries around the world who work for pennies and a few dollars a day. We're not going to compete with that.

We can't compete because people don't have to be in the United

States to work. If you can work with your coworkers from across the hall, you can work with your coworkers across the globe. All you need is a cell phone, a computer and a modem, a fax machine, you can work anywhere in the world.

You don't need to be close to your customers. You can manufacture your goods anywhere and send them anywhere else in the world almost overnight.

And you don't need to be in the United States to finance a new plant. Used to be you had to be here to finance a plant. With worldwide banking you can have that plant located anywhere in the world.

The competitive advantage we have is the fact that businesses know that they can get well-educated and well-trained workers if they locate in the United States. But unfortunately, we're losing that competitive advantage.

In a recent measure of high school achievement, we found that students in the United States ranked below dozens of other countries in math and science. And so we're losing that competitive advantage. And the Education and Labor Committee is, therefore, focused on improving our international standing.

Earlier this year, the House passed the bill to renew the Head Start program with renewed emphasis on early Head Start. These programs are critical to getting our children on the right path early in life and the earlier, the better. At the K-12 level, the committee is also working towards renewing the No Child Left Behind Act. We will be addressing issues in that bill, for example, finding ways to meaningfully measure and reduce the achievement gap; ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers, and to effectively improve those schools which fail to make adequate yearly progress.

One of the most critical issues that must be addressed in No Child Left Behind is the fact that approximately one-third of all high school students in the United States fail to graduate with their peers. And in some communities, as many as half of the students fail to graduate and find themselves on the path to hopelessness.

The Education and Labor Committee will also consider renewing the Higher Education Act, which is primarily focused on access to college. Last year, approximately 1 million qualified students did not go to college because they could not afford the cost. Since the 2001/2002 school year, tuition at a public 4-year college has risen 55 percent. But during that same period the maximum Pell Grant only went up about 8 percent, and in the last 4 years didn't go up at all.

Unfortunately, this means that many of today's students, unlike previous generations, are being denied the opportunity to live to their fullest potential because they were denied the opportunity of a college education.

This year, the Education and Labor Committee is leading legislation that will significantly improve access to college with improved Pell Grants and cuts in student loans.

So, Mr. Speaker, education affects many issues that we deal with: economic competitiveness, crime and welfare. And so I'd like to thank the gentlelady from Michigan, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Ms. *Kilpatrick*, for organizing the effort to focus on education tonight.