GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on further consideration of H.R. 2264, and that I may include tabular and extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JONES). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of Thursday, July 31, 1997, and rule XXIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2264.

□ 1149

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 2264) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes, with Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska, Chairman pro tempore, in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. When the Committee of the Whole rose on Tuesday, September 9, 1997, the bill was open for amendment from page 64, line 1, through page 65, line 3.

Are there any amendments to this portion of the bill?

AMENDMENT NO. 43 OFFERED BY MR. PETERSON OF PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I offer an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Amendment No. 43 offered by Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania:

Page 64, line 7, after each dollar amount, insert ''(decreased by $20,000,000)''.

Page 69, line 26, after each dollar amount, insert ''(increased by $20,000,000)''.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to ask for support for the Peterson-Blunt amendment. Mr. Chairman, I would first like to thank the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. PORTER], chairman of the subcommittee, for his willingness to facilitate this amendment. I would also like to thank the gentleman from Wisconsin [Mr. OBEY], ranking member, for his cooperation, and I would also like to thank the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. BLUNT] for his support of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is offered to reaffirm actions taken by the House at the end of July. Before we left, this body overwhelmingly adopted H.R. 1853, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Amendments Act, by a vote of 414 to 12.

Mr. Chairman, it was this tremendous support that encouraged me to offer this amendment. The amendment which I am offering today will increase the vocational education basic State grant account by $20 million, with an offset from the Goals 2000 Program.

Vocational education is a very essential part of our educational system and particularly for rural America. For a variety of reasons, a postsecondary education is not the answer for every student, with many of them living in rural America. In fact, about half of our Nation's graduating senior class will choose to attend college and roughly half of those will receive a degree.

Mr. Chairman, a responsible and appropriate avenue for outfitting the rest of our Nation's youth with the skills to make them attractive and competitive in the job market is a commitment from the Federal Government in assisting local schools. The best avenue for this commitment is through continued support of vocational education.

Mr. Chairman, true education reform will only take place at the local level. It is time that we provide the resources to our schools to make the needed and necessary changes for improvement. H.R. 1853 will enable this to happen by directing more funds to local education agencies and removing a number of requirements which prevent school districts from taking steps necessary for providing an appropriate academic education.

How significant is a $20 million increase for a program funded at nearly $1 billion? In these times of budget constraint, any increase is significant. However, Mr. Chairman, if H.R. 1853 were law, the formula that we have in it will drive 90 percent of the money down to the school districts, where historically under the current vocational act only 75 percent of the money actually reached the school districts. So this will be a significant increase, the 2 percent that the $20 million will give.

Mr. Chairman, to put this another way, a 2-percent increase will enable a 20-percent increase in funding for local education agencies if the House-passed measure becomes law. Being a legislator for nearly 20 years now, I have always felt it was important to reinforce legislative improvements through the budget process.

By adopting the Peterson-Blunt amendment, we will be doing just that and sending a message to the American people that we are serious about legislation enacted by this body. Vocational education is a vital program for the future of America.

This legislation, overwhelmingly agreed to, is good legislation. I urge my colleagues to support both. Support this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that the amendment is agreeable to both sides and will be accepted. For that I again thank the gentleman from Illinois and the gentleman from Wisconsin for their willingness to work with us.

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. I yield to the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Chairman, we believe that the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. PETERSON] offers an excellent amendment, and we will accept the amendment.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

Mr. Chairman, I am frankly of mixed views on this amendment. Let me simply recite for the committee what has already transpired with respect to Goals 2000.

Mr. Chairman, last year Goals was funded at $491 million level. The administration asked for a $620 million funding level this year. The bill as reported by the committee cut Goals 2000 to $475 million, which is $16 million below the previous year.

On the floor, we had an amendment adopted which cut it further to $462 million, and now this amendment cuts it to $442 million.

Mr. Chairman, I would simply point out to the House that this Goals 2000 issue, which has become so politicized, started out as a joint effort of President Bush and the National Governors. The person who headed up, or one of the two Governors who headed up the Governors' Task Force on Education, working with the President, was a fellow by the name of then-Gov. Bill Clinton. I remember going to a conference and talking with a number of Governors, including then-Governor Clinton, about it.

Mr. Chairman, I am baffled by why it has become so politicized, and I have misgivings about this amendment. But I am willing to accept it as a gesture of goodwill, indicating flexibility on our part. But I have to say in the process that as this bill moves through, it is important to remember that there are three different groups who have to be satisfied in the end for this legislation to pass. The legislative priorities of the majority in this House have to be respected; the legislative priorities of the minority in this House have to be respected; and so do the legislative priorities of the President.

That does not mean we have to rubber stamp everything that he does, and we do not have to rubber stamp everything that each other does. But I think that we are at a point where we have cut this program far enough.

Mr. Chairman, I am willing to accept the gentleman's amendment. I have been a longtime supporter of vocational education. The first issue I ran on when I ran for the State legislature was reform of vocational education. When I was in the legislature, we created on a bipartisan basis an entirely new system of vocational education and technical schools in my own State.