in Ladakh and it claims sovereignty over the entire 35,000 square miles of India's Northeastern most province. The pending amendment rightly points out that India has not joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. But the amendment fails to recognize that the NPT seeks to ensure the current five nuclear powers alone are able to possess nuclear weapons. This means that China can maintain its arsenal, but India cannot. India has not signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for similar reasons.

Mr. President, there appears to be a serious contradiction represented in our foreign policy which makes no sense to me. It is for this reason that I cannot support this amendment and will vote against it. I yield the floor.

Mr. BROWNBACK addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I urge adoption of the amendment.

Mr. LEVIN. I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 2407), as modified, was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question now is on agreeing to the first-degree amendment.

The amendment (No. 2405), as amended, was agreed to.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I just say one final thing. I appreciate the committee working with us, the ranking member and chairman of the committee; I thank them very much.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I did not hear whether there was a motion to reconsider. If not, I move to reconsider that vote.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. THURMOND. As I understand, we are due back on this bill at 12 o'clock tomorrow. Is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That has not yet been ordered.

Mr. THURMOND. The defense authorization bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It has not yet been ordered.

Mr. THURMOND. Do we anticipate being back at 12 o'clock tomorrow?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is the answer to the question.

Mr. THURMOND. I would like for Members who have any amendments to offer to come down and offer these amendments. We have got to push this bill. This is a vital bill. It concerns every citizen in this country. This defense bill is very, very important, and we do not want to be delayed in carrying it on and on. Let's act promptly and show the world that we stand for a strong defense.

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, let me join the chairman of the committee in urging our colleagues to bring amendments to the floor tomorrow, as we anticipate, when we return to this bill at around noon. We now have removed a major roadblock to considering other amendments, so the floor will be open at that time for other amendments to be considered, and we hope our colleagues will bring those to the floor.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EDUCATIONAL SAVINGS AND SCHOOL EXCELLENCE ACT OF 1998—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I now ask that the Chair lay before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 2646, the Coverdell A+ education bill, and it be considered under the provisions of the earlier consent agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2646), have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by majority of the conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of June 15, 1998.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, first I would like to commend the conferees. I would like to commend Chairman ARCHER of the conference committee. I believe they have brought to the Senate, as they did the House, a sweeping education reform proposal that will affect millions upon millions of American children trying successfully to obtain a quality education. They have obtained a bipartisan approach that has been embraced by some of the more distinguished Members of the other side who will speak to this. To paraphrase Senator LIEBERMAN in the press conference at the announcement of the conference report, he said it was clear to him that the Republican leadership had reached out to his party and to the President, and he thought the time had come for their side to reach out as well. And, therefore, we now begin a discussion of the conference report on education reform in the United States.

Mr. President, first I would like to talk, just briefly, about the number of people who will be affected if what is clearly going to pass the Senate with a very strong vote and has passed the House already and will be sent to the President to consider, is signed by the President. In the first case, some 14 million families will open education savings accounts who are the parents of 20 million children. Think about it. That is about half of the school population in kindergarten through high school that would be the beneficiary—half of the school population of the United States. These are precarious times. As we come to a new century, we have a new tool to use to help parents see to the needs of their children.

What has always been amazing to me about this proposal—which the other side has pointed out almost ridiculously, but I will come to that—is that it is a very modest form of tax relief because it allows the interest buildup on these savings accounts to accrue without being taxed so long as the account is used for an educational purpose. The tax relief, therefore, for these education savings accounts over the next 5 years, is a little over $1 billion, $1 billion to $1.3 billion.

What is amazing is how little incentive it takes to make Americans do huge things, because that limited tax relief will cause those 14 million families on behalf of their 20-plus million children to save over $5 billion. Over 10 years it will cause them to save over $12 billion. It is just amazing.

I was just reading a report where the savings rate in the United States has plunged to 3.9 percent, one of the lowest levels in a half a century. So this becomes win/win, because not only does it cause Americans to save, and large sums of money, but it is for education, the Nation's No. 1 problem by everybody's account as we come to the new century.

It does a lot of other things as well. The conference report will help over 1 million students deal with the costs of higher education because it helps qualified State tuition programs and protects them from tax burdens, and that makes them more valuable. Over 1 million students will benefit from this; 21 States already have these plans and 17 have them under consideration. It has a component in the conference report which came out of the Senate Finance Committee, which will help over 1 million employees expand their continuing education. It will help 1 million employees seek continuing education because it will allow employers to spend up to $5,250 on behalf of an employee's continuing education, and it is not seen as taxable income to the employee. So over a million employees will benefit from it.

It has an arbitrage rebate exception for public school bonds, which will help the construction of public schools.

The provision that was inserted in the Finance Committee from Senator GRAHAM, which I believe is a very good provision which would be broader on school construction, did not become a

part of the conference report, I am sorry to say. I hope I will be able to work with the Senator from Florida to expand that at another day.

It includes a provision that was adopted by the Senate with 100 votes, the Reading Excellence Act, which authorizes a literacy program which focuses on training teachers to teach reading with scientifically proven methods like phonics. The House passed similar language unanimously, and the President of the United States endorsed this bill. So here we have a provision that received total bipartisan support and has been endorsed by the President of the United States.

It retains the same-sex school provision of Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON of Texas, which makes it an allowable use of Federal education dollars to fund education reform projects that provide same-gender schools and classrooms as long as comparable educational opportunities are offered for students of both sexes.

It keeps the Senate-passed measure, Teacher Testing Merit Pay, by the Senator from New York; Dollars to the Classroom, which requires 95 percent of Federal education dollars to find their way to the classroom, by the Senator from Arkansas, Senator HUTCHINSON; the Student Improvement Grant Program, offered by the Senator from Idaho, Senator KEMPTHORNE; a multilingualism study, by Senator MCCAIN; and SAFE Schools, by Senator DORGAN.

Mr. President, in deference to the chairman of the Finance Committee, who has now arrived, I yield the floor.

Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, I thank very much the distinguished Senator from Georgia for his courtesy. Let me once again applaud and congratulate him for the leadership he has provided in this matter of education, of helping us to show our parents throughout this country it is within reach financially. I think this legislation would never have reached this point had it not been for his active leadership.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware is recognized.

Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, the Federal Government has a responsibility to promote policies and programs that make quality education accessible to students, to their parents, and to their families. Today, students and parents are under an enormous burden when it comes to paying for education. There is serious and legitimate concern about the accessibility of quality schools and teachers and materials necessary for success.

And costs continue to rise.

With the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 we succeeded in helping parents and students prepare for and even offset some of the escalating costs associated with higher education. For example:

We created an education savings IRA to allow parents to save for higher education.

We expanded the tax-deferred treatment of State-sponsored prepaid tuition plans.

We restored the tax deduction on student loan interest.

We extended the tax-free treatment of employer-provided educational assistance.

And, we established tax credits—the HOPE scholarship and the Lifetime Learning Credite—for students to use in connection with their education.

Each of these measures goes a long, long way toward helping our students and their families handle the financial burden associated with college life.

But, Mr. President, we did not go far enough. Personally, I would like to have seen more powerful measures. The Senate version of the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 actually contained stronger provisions, but they were dropped as part of the conference agreement.

I firmly believe in those stronger measures and so I introduced them as a separate bill on the very day that we passed the Taxpayer Relief Act. My objective then was the same as it is today—to help American families afford the costs of a quality education.

I proposed to push the education IRA from its $500-a-year limit to $2,000 a year, and to allow withdrawals for elementary and secondary school; to make tax-free treatment of employer-provided educational assistance permanent and to reinstate it for graduate education; and to make State-sponsored prepaid tuition programs tax free, not just tax deferred. These were my objectives as 1997 came to a close, and I am happy to say that we have succeeded in adopting many of them with this bill, the Education Savings and School Excellence Act of 1998.

This bill comes out of the Senate Finance Committee with bipartisan support. As I already indicated, the distinguished Senator from Georgia has played a leading role in helping shepherd this important piece of legislation through the Senate. Our bill allows families to increase their contributions to education IRAs from $500 to $2,000 per year. Not only will the $2,000 per year IRA contributions be available for college, but they can be used for students at any level—from kindergarten all the way through college.

As such, the education IRA will be a tremendous asset to parents and students in grade schools and high schools. The money will be available to help cover the costs associated with both public and private schools. And the money can be used for a multitude of necessities—from buying school uniforms or books to purchasing a new computer.

The bill also makes prepaid tuition programs tax free, meaning that students will be able to withdraw on a tax-free basis the savings that accumulate in their prepaid tuition accounts. Parents will have the incentive to put money away today, and their children will have the full benefit of that money tax free tomorrow.

These innovative proposals will be a boon to higher education—to our students and families. Already, 44 States have prepaid tuition programs in effect.

The other six have legislation to create a State plan, or they have implemented a feasibility study. Such programs will become increasingly more attractive to parents and students, as will individual retirement accounts that allow them to meet the educational needs of their family.

As I have said before, these measures are an important step forward. They are important for our families—for our students—for the future. With this legislation, Congress is demonstrating its leadership on education.

It is a very, very important step in the right direction. And I urge my colleagues to support it.

Again, let me thank my distinguished colleague for his leadership and his courtesy in letting me make my statement at this time.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I also extend my thanks to the chairman of the Finance Committee for his untiring support and patience throughout the long deliberations and for his contributions not only to this education program we have before us but in the area of financial relief and encouragement to American families for years and years and years.

Mr. ROTH. Thank you.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I am going to yield up to 10 minutes to my distinguished colleague from New Jersey. Let me just say, as the principal cosponsor of this education reform package we now have before the Senate, he has worked tirelessly, and not always under the best of circumstances, and has been a remarkable contributor to both the form and the shape and the final substance of the legislation we now have before us.

I yield up to 10 minutes to my distinguished colleague and friend from New Jersey.

Mr. TORRICELLI addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Georgia for yielding me time, but more than that, for his leadership in the course of this Congress to bring to the floor of the Senate, in its final form, the A+ savings accounts.

I also congratulate the conferees for settling what were some real differences in bringing now, in this final form, the A+ savings accounts in such a manner, I believe, that on a bipartisan basis Senators can be both pleased and proud to lend their support in final passage.

Mr. President, upon passage in the Senate of the A+ savings accounts, seven Democratic Senators joined with me in writing the majority leader, expressing our concern that amendments offered by Senator ASHCROFT and Senator GORTON presented some real difficulties to Democratic Members of the Senate in being able to vote for the conference report.

These two amendments would have either prohibited national school testing, which has been a priority of the Clinton administration, or transformed educational funding by the Federal Government into block grants to the States.

Many of us have believed that block granting many of these worthwhile programs would have placed in jeopardy important Federal initiatives in secondary education. And eliminating testing would have prevented milestones in education which the Clinton administration thought were so important.

It is important for Democratic Senators to know both amendments, in an effort to obtain genuine, broad-based bipartisan support, both amendments are not contained in the conference report. The conference report for A+ savings accounts now is the Coverdell-Torricelli bill as originally proposed. That is why I believe, as we are coming to a vote tomorrow, this legislation deserves bipartisan support.

There is nothing here that every Democratic Member of this Senate cannot enthusiastically support and embrace. Indeed, with all respect to my friend, the senior Senator from Georgia, in its purist form this is an idea consistent with Democratic Party philosophies. It is, in fact, everything that President Clinton offered last year with regard to the financing of higher education. Senator COVERDELL is simply now applying that to grade school and secondary school education.

What a simple idea. How basic. American families can save their own money, in their own savings accounts, without taxation, to educate their own children in the school of their choice. What possible argument could anyone have with that proposal? And yet people have found reason to object: first, that it undermines the public schools. On the contrary, not only does it not undermine the public schools, the Joint Committee on Tax is arguing that 70 percent of all of the families who will save money in these accounts for their own children will use it on behalf of public school students. As designed by Senator COVERDELL, this money will be available for afterschool tutoring of public school students, ironically, hiring public schoolteachers, afterschool activities, computers, school supplies, uniforms of public school students.

This does not only not undermine the public school system, it strengthens it by bringing new resources.

The second argument is that, if this is done, it may not hurt the public schools but it is done to help a privileged few. On the contrary; the income limitations used in this legislation of $110,000 to $140,000 are the same the Senate used last year in establishing savings accounts for colleges. It is believed that 75 percent of all the money in these savings accounts will be saved by families with incomes of less than $70,000 a year. This is a middle-income program to help working families educate their children—public or private.

Then the argument is made, maybe it doesn't undermine the public schools, maybe it isn't just for a privileged few, but it doesn't help everybody. It doesn't help everybody. It doesn't help high-income people who are not below the income limitations, and if truth be told, families with no income, the very poor, will not be able to save money.

One warning I received upon entering a career in the U.S. Congress is, never make the perfect the enemy of the good. I know of no legislation in any form, in any endeavor, by any Senator, which helps everybody all the time. Any Senator who comes to this floor looking for that legislation will live a frustrated life in the U.S. Senate.

Suffice it to say, millions of American families, millions of modest background who simply have a child in a public school but would like them to have a home computer, their child is in public school but they would like them to be able to stay in after school and participate in activities that cost money; they are in an urban school but they would like, under mandatory programs, to get their child a school uniform, buy extra books—this program does work for them. And for those 10 percent of American families that send their child to a private school, a parochial school, the yeshiva, because they believe that is best for their circumstances, it helps to ease the burden of their tuition, it is straightforward, it is direct, and, mostly, it is right for the country.

I will concede that, while I enthusiastically support this proposal, this Congress has not been everything it should have been for education. The President challenged the Senate that, from school testing to the reconstruction of our schools to class size, this Congress should have dedicated itself to improving the quality of American education. And it did not. But it has produced this one idea. It may not be the best idea, it is certainly not the only idea, it will not transform American education, but that does not mean it is not a good idea that can help.

I have often believed, in the current state of American education, that everybody has something to offer and there are many good ideas. Everything is defendable in American education except one thing—the status quo. This challenges the status quo. For the first time in a long time, we are opening the possibility that American families can all see themselves as involved again. If you could change one thing, in my judgment, in education today, it would be the belief that families are relevant again to educating their own children. This is no longer simply something in the hands of government, a school board, a union, Washington, or a State capital; we are responsible for the education of our own children.

Senator COVERDELL has established that on every child's birthday, every grandparent, every aunt and uncle, can be relevant again. They can look at a child they care about and, rather than a meaningless toy, rather than some worthless gift, there is an account. Perhaps you would like that child to have a computer, reading materials, participate in afterschool activity; they are struggling in math or science and they would like to have a tutor. Put money in their account, at Christmas or at any time of the year. Let the extended family be involved on the front lines of educating that child.

Beyond that family, when a labor union sits across the table from a great American industrial employer and they have settled on pension benefits and they have settled on health benefits, let that labor union leader have one more question: How about a contribution to the savings account to help educate the children of my membership?

No, it is not going to solve every problem, but we estimate that this proposal will bring $12 billion of private resources to the education of American children. That can't be wrong. It cannot be wrong—$12 billion of new money is now available to help our children in their secondary school education.

If, at the end of the day, its critics are right and all this money is not used for public education or private education but remains in these accounts, then we believe, our critics taken at face value, the worst that could happen is, this money is rolled over into savings accounts for college—meaning that not only will we be provided this option for secondary school education, but the money will then become available for college education—ironically, in accounts established under the leadership of President Clinton and supported on a bipartisan basis in this Senate.

I believe this will pass the Senate. But more significantly, Senator COVERDELL has introduced this Senate into an important and dramatic new debate. We Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservative, will be in a competition in the redesign of American education. No better opportunity, no more timely debate, could be visited upon this Congress than this new competition. It is important. It is worthwhile. If we succeed, we will redesign American education.

Senator COVERDELL has made a valuable addition in beginning this debate. I congratulate him for it. I look forward tomorrow, when we both will return to this floor, to introduce this final debate in enacting A+ savings accounts.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, before the Senator from New Jersey leaves, there has been no more eloquent spokesperson for these reforms than he.

You alluded, Senator, to the gift from the grandparent, but you introduced the debate with the suggestion this could be a form of union negotiations, which I think it would.

I just want to point out two points: The $12 billion we cite is not a calculation of the first dollar that would come from outside sources, which makes this savings account unique—that a union, a company, a neighborhood, a church, anything, could adopt a child with a savings account. None of that money is in the calculation of the $12 billion, and there is no way to estimate, but I believe it will match ultimately the parents' contribution of the $12 billion.

The second point I make is that those who have more difficulty saving because of their income strata will have these outside sources, which is one of the reasons for the sponsor contributions that will help open those accounts for those families who have more difficulty.

As the Senator said, we will not get to all of them, no, but a lot that otherwise would have no opportunity for one of these kinds of accounts to be opened.

The last thing I mention, you talk about parent involvement. What better reminder to the parent about the condition of the child than when they get that booklet and look at it once a month and get a notice from the savings and loan, or from the bank, that says how much is in the account, how much is building up for Johnny or Susie, once a month or once a quarter? Fourteen million-plus families will be reminded that we have some work to do here. I think the benefits of that cannot be calculated, and that the bonding begins to occur every time one of those accounts is open. I thank the Senator.

I yield up to 10 minutes to the distinguished Senator from Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. MACK. Mr. President, I commend Senator TORRICELLI for his comments on this bill and for his efforts, as well, throughout this entire process. I say to my friend, Senator COVERDELL, again, that this would not have happened if it hadn't been for his commitment to this idea, his persistence, and his willingness to, in essence, say it will never end until we pass it. So I commend him for the effort he has made all throughout these months.

This bill will enable working families to keep more of what they earn, and it includes a number of other important education provisions.

My focus during this debate has been on providing every classroom in America with a competent, caring, and qualified teacher. In my opinion, teachers make all the difference in the learning process.

America's classrooms are staffed with many dedicated, knowledgeable, and hard-working teachers. Nevertheless, in classrooms all over America, teachers are being assigned to teach classes for which they have no formal training.

Consider these statistics: Twenty percent of English classes were taught by teachers who did not have at least a minor in English literature, communications, speech, journalism, English education, or reading education. That is one out of five. Twenty-five percent of mathematics classes were taught by teachers without at least a minor in mathematics or mathematics education. That is one out of four. Thirty-nine percent of life sciences or biology classes were taught by teachers without at least a minor in biology or life science. Fifty-six percent of physical science classes were taught by teachers without at least a minor in physics, chemistry, geology, or earth sciences. More than 50 percent of history or world civilization classes were taught by teachers who did not have at least a minor in history. Students in schools with the highest minority enrollments have less than a 50-percent chance of getting a science or mathematics teacher who holds a license and a degree in the field that he or she teaches.

The amendment I introduced, along with Senator D'AMATO, provides incentives for States to test their teachers on the subject matter they teach and to pay their teachers based on merit and proven performance. In light of the statistics I mentioned before, it is clear that teacher testing is necessary and important.

Our amendment passed the Senate by a vote of 63–35, and I am pleased that it is included in this conference report. The Congress should be proud of this bill and the efforts we have made to promote responsible education policy. I hope this bill will receive broad bipartisan support.

Again, I thank the Senator from Georgia for his hard work and dedication on this bill.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Florida for his contribution to the legislation that passed the Senate and the legislation before us in the conference report. He has made the point repeatedly that the No. 1 tool for effectiveness in a classroom is a teacher. His work, with regard to perfecting who that teacher is, is to be noted. I thank the Senator from Florida.

Mr. President, I now yield up to 10 minutes to the Senator from Colorado.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado is recognized.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I rise in support of the conference report to the Educational Savings and School Excellence Act. First of all, before I make my comments, I recognize the leadership of the Senator from Georgia, as my previous colleagues have done. I think he has done a tremendous job in bringing forward the issue of education and what we can do as parents, as Senators, what we can do as school board members, as State legislators, or whatever, to begin to think of innovative ways in which we can improve our educational system. There is no doubt in my mind that we need to have some innovative solutions.

The reason I am supporting this conference report is because this is an innovative approach that involves parents, as well as school board people. It is going to broaden the effort in education. It is going to benefit all schools, whether it is private schools or public schools.

I want to take a few moments to sort of review the history of the A+ accounts. Maybe my colleague has already done that, but I think it is very important that we do that. In doing this, I am going to urge my colleagues to join me in supporting these new opportunities that we are going to be creating for children and their families to receive the best possible education.

Now, reviewing the history a little bit, last year, we authorized educational savings accounts for those individuals who were going to post-secondary education, going on to colleges and vocational schools after graduating from high school. Beginning last June, we introduced this opportunity to more American families by adopting an amendment to the Taxpayer Relief Act, which established education savings accounts. Now, this amendment passed, but it was dropped from the Taxpayer Relief Act bill, due to a veto threat.

Senator COVERDELL's A+ savings account was introduced as a separate bill, and it was passed this spring by a vote of 56–43. I was delighted with the outcome of that vote. Following the recent conference agreement on the Educational Savings and School Excellence Act, I am confident that we have before us a bill that makes sense for all families and children—those who seek private or public education.

The conference report was passed by the House last week, and it is our turn to pass this bill and hand the President a new opportunity to improve education.

I would like to go over a few provisions of the Educational Savings and School Excellence Act, putting forth the A+ accounts. Our legislation increases the dollar amount from $500 to $2,000, the amount that parents can set aside to save for their children's education for both public and private elementary and secondary school expenses.

With the education savings account, the money is never Government money, so issues of Government intervention and the constitutionality of using Government funds for religious schools is not a real argument in this debate.

This bill would empower parents with the financial tools to provide for all of the needs they recognize in their children—needs that teachers or administrators should not be trusted to address in the same way that a parent can.

This bill would allow families, single parents, or anyone earning less than $95,000 annually to deposit up to $2,000 per child in after-tax income into those interest-bearing savings accounts each year.

The option for using these funds are simply endless. Raising a child is expensive—we all know that as parents—

whether the child is attending a private school or a public school. My children happen to have attended public schools and I will be the first to admit that education is expensive. This bill will help parents save for computers, tutoring expenses—if you have a child with special needs—uniforms, transportation—if you are in rural areas and you have special transportation needs out there—SAT prep courses, so they can get ready for higher education, postsecondary education, or even tuition for private schools.

Now I would like to go over a few reasons why I am supporting this legislation. I think this bill is simply good news for all students—especially those in public schools.

This legislation does not ignore any school whatsoever. Numerous provisions have been included to improve public education, as well as private education. It assists smaller schools by increasing the amount of school construction bonds that smaller school districts can use. It provides incentives for public schools to strive for higher academic achievement. It encourages teachers to improve literacy programs by training them to use proven methods, such as phonics. It will help students stay in school by authorizing a national dropout prevention program. To make schools more safe, we have included a provision that allows weapons brought to school to be used as evidence in any internal school disciplinary proceedings.

In addition, the bill includes the provision to make savings in qualified State tuition plans completely tax free. These tuition plans are powerful incentives for parents to save for their children's college education.

My State of Colorado is one of 21 States that has already implemented this kind of program. I can tell you from what I have observed in my State of Colorado, it is catching on, and it is popular.

This bill would free up plan holders from having to pay Federal tax on interest buildup. This means more savings for tuition, room, board, and books or supplies. Tax relief for these plans offers yet one more reason to support this conference report.

This bill is about freedom. It is about education. Let's take a step forward in improving our Nation's education system for all American children. I encourage my colleagues to join me in passing the Education Savings and School Excellence Act today and to support the conference report.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. ALLARD. I yield to the Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. The Senator was describing the chronology of the account. He hit on a very important point that I want to reinforce. The Senator from New Jersey did it well. That is, last year, with the President's cooperation, Congress initiated and he signed an education savings account that was only $500, and only for higher education. This proposal, according to the description of the Senator from Colorado—which is correct, I might add—says that we will make the $500 go up to $2,000. You can save four times as much. You can use it for higher education or for any grade, kindergarten through high school.

This has taken what we celebrated with bands and celebrations on the White House Lawn last year and made it broader. It is not just $500 for higher education now, it is $2,000. It is not just for higher education, it can be used for kindergarten all the way through high school, or higher education. We use the identical criteria that we used to determine which middle-class families could use it. It is the same.

Am I properly describing the point that the Senator made?

Mr. ALLARD. The Senator has properly described it.

Again, the thing that excites me so much about this particular piece of legislation is, it is for all students. Traditionally, this has always been thought of in terms of postsecondary—actually, through graduation from high school. But now in this particular piece of legislation, we are thinking in terms of kindergarten, first grade, second grade, which gives a lot of flexibility to parents to decide what is the best educational plan for their students, by bringing this plan and incorporating the money that can be used for many, many different purposes. It might be that there is a special-education student out there who needs some special help because of some deficiencies, needs some special help because of deficiencies in hearing or maybe sight; maybe a rural family has some problem with transportation.

This flexibility is going to help education, whether it is private or public schools. I think it is going to improve the general educational effort. The real benefactor in all of this is going to be public education, because it is going to be supportive of what we are already doing in education. It doesn't take away from public education, it adds to it.

I want to compliment the Senator from Georgia on working so very hard on this issue and his leadership. I think it is something that we can all be proud of.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. COVERDELL. I thank the Senator from Colorado.

Mr. COVERDELL addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, just to expand on what the Senator from Colorado said, we talked earlier about the 14 million families that would save up to $12 billion. And those dollars can be used for any educational purpose. As the Senator from Colorado alluded, it can be a computer, it can be a special learning problem that requires special attention, or it can be an afterschool program. I call this money ''smart money.'' What I mean is that this money will ultimately go right to the target of the child's needs. A lot of money in public education can't do that, understandably, with buildings, turning on lights, and paying salaries. But this money will be guided almost like a missile system right to the problem the child has. And it is being guided by those who know best what that problem is—their parents. So the exponential value of this money is much greater than most education dollars can achieve.

Mr. President, I would like to take just a few minutes to sort of underscore why education has become the No. 1 issue in our country and take us back 15 years ago to Secretary Bell, who was President Reagan's first Education Secretary. He had this Department of Education publish a book that became known as ''A Nation At Risk.'' That is the name of the publication. It described a general condition and warned the Nation that we are developing a vast problem in our academic system. But it focused primarily on kindergarten through high school.

It is interesting to look at where we have come since he notified America and the education community that we have a problem.

In that report, ''A Nation At Risk,'' it said international comparisons of student achievement reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first and never second; and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, we were last seven times.

In 1998, 15 years later, a recently released study shows that American 12th graders ranked 19th out of 21 industrialized nations in mathematics and 16th out of 21 in science. In other words, we were never first 15 years ago, we were never second, and we were last seven times. After 15 years of effort, we are 19th out of 21; we are not even close to first or second. And we are 16th out of 21. In other words, we have gone backwards.

Fifteen years ago, 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate, according to the report. And in 1992, 20 percent of the adult population had only rudimentary reading and writing skills. That is going in the wrong direction. Fifteen years ago, 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States were considered functionally illiterate, and functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent. The literacy level of young adults aged 15 to 21 dropped 11 points from 1984 to 1992, and 25 percent of all 12th graders scored below basics in reading on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Fifteen years ago, ''A Nation At Risk'' reported that between 1975 and 1980 remedial mathematics courses in public 4-year colleges increased 72 percent and then constituted one-quarter—25 percent—of all mathematics

courses taught in these institutions. They were saying, in 4-year colleges, one quarter of all mathematics courses dealt with remedial education. In 1995, 30 percent of first-time college freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial course and 80 percent of all public 4-year universities offered remedial courses.

In other words, Mr. President, in every one of these categories, one after the other, the warning given to us in 1983, 15 years ago, has not caused us—I know it has caused us to spend millions and billions of our dollars, but the point is, as the Senator from New Jersey said a moment ago, the status quo is unacceptable, and the status quo produced results, after having received the warning 15 years ago, that are worse than they were 15 years ago. It is very alarming, the recent study that said only 4 out of 10 students in inner-city schools can now pass a basic math exam, and if you take all the schools and put them together, we get it up to only 6 out of 10.

We cannot accept this. Innovation is being begged for.

If we allow this to continue, for the first time in America—America has never had a caste system. There has always been massive mobility in economic achievement—people on the bottom rung moving up, people on the top moving down. It has been the story of America. But if we keep putting people on the street who cannot read and write, and if we spend another 15 years like we have the last 15, we will produce a permanent economic caste system in the country and we will forever change the nature of this great Republic. We will forever change it if we ever accept a condition by which thousands upon thousands, millions of students come out of high school and cannot effectively read or write.

How much time remains on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWNBACK). The Senator from Georgia has 1 hour remaining on his side.

Mr. COVERDELL. That cannot be correct. We had 2 hours equally divided, and I think we began at about 5:20. So I would estimate we have about 5 minutes remaining on our side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct. Today he has 5 minutes remaining. Tomorrow he has 1 hour.

Mr. COVERDELL. I see. OK. I understand the point. Tomorrow we have another 2 hours equally divided.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. COVERDELL. I see we have been joined by the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, who will be arguing the other side, and for his benefit I will go on another several minutes here.

Mr. President, the Senator from Massachusetts will endeavor to infer that this undermines public education, and the Secretary of the administration has inferred as much. It is just absolutely incorrect. Mr. President, 70 percent of the 14 million families, 11 million families who open these accounts will have students in public schools, as the Senator from New Jersey noted. Because they are in public schools at the end of the day and this money is divided, the families who have children in public schools will represent about half the $12 billion that is saved over the next decade, and the families who have children in private schools will save the other half.

That is understandable, because the families who have made a decision to send their child to a private school know they have to save more. But the bottom line is, 70 percent of the families will have kids in public schools, 30 percent in private. Fifty percent of the money will support children in public schools, and 50 percent will support children in private schools or home schools.

The other side will try to infer that this is a voucher. Vouchers are the redistribution of public money. The money going into these savings accounts is aftertax dollars, and the only tax benefit available is that the interest earned would be forgiven of tax so long as the dollars were used for an educational purpose. This is not a voucher.

Several people on the other side have suggested that this is insignificant, that it is not a great amount of money, and they are right. The tax incentive is minimal over the 10-year period, but what is stunning about it is how much it causes these American families to save on their own—new money. No board of education has had to raise the millage rate. There is no new State income tax. There is no new Federal income tax. This is the flow of the volunteer money to help students in public, private, and home schools.

The other side likes to infer from time to time that this only benefits the wealthy. Seventy percent of the money would go to families earning $75,000 or less, and we get into all kinds of arguments over which families are what. But I would only make this point, that the determination of who can open these accounts and who benefits from them is middle class driven, and in this legislation we are discussing in the Chamber right now, the criteria are identical to the criteria that were designed by the other side last year, for what really was a minimal savings account of up to $500 to help families for higher education only. And we have said, well, let's expand that; let's let them at least save $2,000, and let's let them use it for any school year—kindergarten all the way through college; let's give them more opportunity and more flexibility.

But the families involved are identical to the families who celebrated last year on the White House lawn when the President signed legislation that created a $500 savings account just for college. And here we are today, saying, let's make it $2,000 for college or any other grade.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks recognition?

The Senator from the great State of Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I want to congratulate the Senator from Georgia in bringing the legislation to where it is at the present time out of the conference. I admire his persistence, but I believe he is fundamentally wrong in his approach to education.

I want to just mention very briefly, when I arrived over here, the good Senator was talking about the Nation At Risk report. I was in the Senate when the Nation At Risk study was done. We had very extensive hearings on it. The Nation At Risk was primarily a report done by a superb group of education leaders. While I was listening to my friend from Georgia, I was harkening back to the various recommendations of those who had done that extensive study to which the Senator referred.

The fact of the matter is, the Nation at Risk report authored by a bipartisan commission, made recommendations that mirror the recommendations that were made by the President of the United States this year. With all respect to the Senator from Georgia, there is no reference in there about the tax breaks and voucher programs that he has described. What was recommended in the report is the hard work that has been recommended by, not only the Nation At Risk panel, but most of the educators since that time.

What we need is more and better teachers. This is very important, particularly given the fact we are going to need some 2 million more teachers over the period of the next 10 years. The Nation At Risk commission thought that upgrading the skills of teachers is one of the most important things we can do. They also said that raising standards for children so they will be challenged to meet their highest educational ability, instead of dumbing down the curriculum to the lowest expectations.

The Nation At Risk report recommended that we devote more time for learning. That means afterschool programs and extended day programs. And we know that spending more time on learning works. In my own State of Massachusetts, the Timility Middle School in Roxbury, MA, was long known for its low test scores and high suspension rates for students. Under Project Promise, the school extended learning time by 90 minutes 4 days a week and opened for 3 hours on Saturday. The result is more students receive the help they need, parents are more involved, student attendance is up, student absence is down, reading and math scores have improved—by investing in public schools, not abandoning them.

In addition, there is general recognition that you cannot teach children in antiquated schools or schools that are falling apart—yet so many of the nation's schools are. In fact, the GAO

found that over $100 billion is needed for help and assistance to rebuild and modernize our schools in our cities, suburbs, and rural communities.

But the Coverdell bill will spend $1.6 billion over 10 years. Is that going to solve all of the problems that have been outlined by my friend from Georgia? That is quite a stretch, particularly because it doesn't help the public schools.

The Coverdell bill is not trying to give support for these kinds of initiatives that are facing communities across this country, with many of these children who are sons and daughters of working families who do not have the ability and resources to be able to put aside the money that would be necessary in this program.

In Waltham, MA, 215 math teachers are learning innovative techniques in teacher training programs. They are working with bankers, engineers, high-tech experts, and college math professors to learn more about math, how to teach it well, and how to link it to the real-world experience of the students.

The early indications are that when these teachers go back to their schools, they are seeing improved academic achievement from the students. But under the Coverdell bill, we won't get any kind of help and assistance for these kinds of innovative programs that are taking place. This legislation does nothing to support innovative programs like these. It does nothing to strengthen public schools. Instead, it uses a regressive tax policy to subsidize vouchers for private schools and gives no significant financial help to working families and no help to children in the Nation's classrooms. What it does is provide an unjustified tax giveaway to the wealthy and to private schools.

Public education is one of the great success stories of American democracy. It makes no sense for Congress to undermine it. Yet this bill turns its back on the Nation's longstanding support for public schools and earmarks tax dollars for private schools. It is an unwarranted step in the wrong direction for education, for public schools, and for the Nation's children. It would spend the $1.6 billion over the next 10 years on subsidies to help the wealthy pay the private school expenses they already pay and do nothing to help the children in the public schools get a better education.

It is important to continue the national investment in children and their future. We should invest more in improving public schools by repairing crumbling facilities, by recruiting more and training better teachers, by reducing class size, by developing responsible afterschool activities, and by taking many other steps.

If we add $1.6 billion to spend on elementary and secondary education, we should spend it wisely on these problems, not waste it on bad education policy and bad tax policy. We should rebuild our public schools, not build new tax shelters for the wealthy.

According to the Joint Tax Committee, over half of the benefits—$800 million—will go to 7 percent of the families with children in private schools. Did you note when my friend from Georgia was here he said: 70 percent of the families that can use this tax break will be making under $70,000. But let's find out where the money is going, Senator. We are not just talking about who may be able to use the program. Let's look at what the Joint Tax Committee says. Let's read the next line. Let's ask where the money is going, not who ''may benefit.'' I heard that out here four or five times in the last hour, look who is going to benefit, all of these families below $70,000—''may benefit.'' May benefit. The fact is, the Joint Tax Committee has indicated that $800 million, half of all the money, will go to the 7 percent of families whose children are already in private schools.

If you are going to fight for a particular program, at least have the intellectual honesty to state what it is going to do and try to defend it. I can understand why those who support this program run from all the details, try to really say it's doing something that it does not do. With all respect, when I listen to those who have been supporting the program, I have to wonder how this program is going to solve the education problems for the young people? Proponents use the National at Risk as a starting point, but they, again, don't tell you the next line. The Nation at Risk gave recommendations on how to improve education, but they are not the ones included in the Coverdell bill. Here it is. The Joint Tax Committee: 93 percent of the children in the country go to the public schools; 7 percent go to private schools; and 48 percent of the monetary benefit that will come from here will go to the public schools; but 52 percent—more than half—will go to the 7 percent of the children who go to the private schools.

You can say 70 percent of the families that are eligible for this tax break go to the public schools. But that's not where the money goes. And we all know that where the money goes is what counts around here. The money goes to families who already send their children to private school. We believe that we should not abandon the public schools. We ought to commit ourselves to helping and assisting the public schools and the children who attend them.

The bottom line is clear. The scarce tax dollars should be targeted to public schools. They don't have the luxury of closing their doors to students who pose special challenges, such as children with disabilities, limited English-proficient children, or homeless students. This bill will not help children who need help the most.

Parental choice is a mirage. Private schools apply different rules from public schools. Public schools must accept all children. Private schools can decide whether to accept a child or not. The real choice belongs to schools, not to the parents. It belongs to schools, not to the parents. Public schools must accept all children and develop programs to meet their needs. Private schools only accept children who fit the guidelines of their existing policy. So, if we are talking about public funds that are contributed from working families, we ought to be using those funds where the children of those working families go to school.

And that means supporting the public schools. But the majority of the money goes to the seven percent of families sending their children to private schools.

We have a series of recommendations that have been made by the top education community in this country. They are common-sense recommendations: Smaller classrooms, modernizing schools, upgrading teacher training, and expanding afterschool programs. These have all been outlined here, and they were all rejected on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Then we are asked to accept this bill to support private schools or nothing. We are asked to accept this or nothing.

We even had a modest rehabilitation program by our friend and colleague, the Senator from Florida, Senator GRAHAM, that was dropped in the conference, to try to increase assistance for school construction.

Another program that the President talked about is the Educational Opportunity Zones to provide support to those school districts that are willing to invest in major restructuring, reorganization, and innovation in order to improve student academic achievement. The program provides some incentives for those exciting programs.

You can say, what is an example where that program would work? Chicago is the example for that. Chicago is really doing a very important and effective job to try to give some help and assistance to its schools and to its parents and teachers who are trying to do the job of educating children, to do it right. We recognize that there are many communities that are trying to improve their schools, and we should support them.

I am proud of what the city of Boston is doing, Mr. President. We saw just yesterday the Boston Globe was reporting on the most recent math and reading tests in that city and how, for the first time in many years, there was increased performance of students across the board in reading and math, and in some of the most difficult schools with high suspension rates, dropouts rates—the most troubled schools—how they have been able to see a significant improvement in academic achievement and accomplishment.

That is happening in the public schools among some very needy children in a major city. Why? Because we have had a superintendent and a mayor who are committed to providing resources and discipline to enhance the education of the public schools—not abandon them.

We have nothing against the private schools. There are many wonderful private schools. But we are talking about, in a budget with scarce resources, funds paid in by working families through their taxes. And, in the consideration of the budget, after the President's programs—smaller class size, upgrading the skills for teachers, modernizing our schools, expanding after-school programs—have been defeated, we are forced to consider this program that does what? Benefits the private schools—benefits the private schools.

So, Mr. President, this proposal does not deserve to go into law. The President is right to veto this proposal. He is right to send it back to the Congress and say, ''Start over again. Start over again.'' We have time to do that. We have been fussing around here for 4 weeks debating the tobacco bill and then find that the point of order was made on it. It could have been made 4 weeks earlier in order to dismiss that as a result of big tobacco.

We are not debating the education priorities of the American people. We are not debating the health care priorities of the American people, such as the Patients' Bill of Rights. People in this country want to see the reform of our health care system to eliminate the abuses of HMOs. Managed care too often means mismanaged care. The American people want these decisions made, that are affecting their health, by doctors and not insurance company accountants. We ought to be debating that. But we cannot debate that. It is nowhere on the Republican leader's schedule.

And we ought to start over here, after the President's veto, and debate, what we can do as a legislative body, with scarce resources, that will make the best, most effective impact on improving the quality of education and achievement and accomplishment for the 90 percent of children in the public schools? Public money for public schools—that is the central challenge. And this particular measure fails on all accounts.

So I hope, Mr. President, that we can get about the business in the remaining days of this Congress and support what we know is being done in rural, urban, and suburban communities, with scarce resources, by creative, dedicated people who are absolutely committed to their children in those communities, who are working tirelessly, exhaustively, to raise academic achievement and improve public schools.

Do we have a ways to go? Yes. Will $1.6 billion solve the whole problem? No, and we should invest more—much more—in improving our public schools. But the question for us today is, Is this the best way to spend $1.6 billion of the American taxpayers' dollars to improve public schools? The answer is no. And for that reason, I believe that this measure should not win the support of the Members of this body.

Mr. President, I know we are under a time fix. Whatever time remains on our side I yield to the good Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota has 16 minutes 30 seconds.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, in the spirit of debate, let me just say to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that I just do not think this passes the credibility test as an education program for our country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator from Minnesota will yield for a minute, the Chair misspoke. The Senator from Minnesota has approximately 40 minutes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, we are talking about a $1.7 billion initiative, and that is over a period of 5 years. The idea is that you can take $2,000 and you can put it in a special account, education account.

Now, for those who are following this debate, I would ask this question: How many families are in a position to take $2,000 out and put it in a savings account for education? This just kind of misses the essence of the reality of the vast majority of families in this country. And that is why the Joint Tax Committee said that this $1.7 billion, over 5 years, which is touted as a major education program for our children, will amount to about $96 for wealthy parents for private schools, and this bill will give the rest of the parents about $7.

So there is the question as to whether or not we want to take public taxpayer money and put it into private schools, but there is also the question, as my colleague from Massachusetts was focusing on, as to who exactly it is going to benefit.

Mr. President, above and beyond the problem that the vast majority of families get no benefit from this, there is another problem. This is, again, a kind of tax policy; it is not an education program. I will get to that in a moment. And the tax benefits go, by and large, to the wealthiest citizens. I guess this is my Republican colleagues' definition of justice or fairness. But I do not think most of the people in the country agree with that.

Where this proposal, however, I think is really most flawed has to do with what it does in education. I have tried to, to the best of my ability as a Senator from Minnesota, about every 2 weeks, to be in a school teaching somewhere. And I see nothing at all in what my colleagues on the other side of the aisle call an education proposal that deals with the real needs.

Will there be any funding to rebuild crumbling schools? No. And, by the way, let me say this again on the floor of the Senate: I have seen too many schools in the South, in the East, in the North, and in the West, where the ceilings are crumbling, they are asbestos laden, with decrepit toilets, without adequate heating systems; and we are not putting any money to help rebuild these crumbling schools.

I would say the pages who are here, the students—what kind of message do we communicate to students who go to those schools about whether we value them or not? There is not one penny in this legislation that does anything about these crumbling schools. That would really be a commitment to public education.

Is there any funding in this amendment—which is, by the way, pitifully inadequate in the first place—that will do anything to reduce class size? Well, no.

If you were to believe that students know a little bit about their own education—I haven't been to one school anywhere in Minnesota or in the country where when I asked students, What do you think would be some of the best things we could do to make education better for you, that students haven't talked about smaller class sizes. Is there anything in this pitifully inadequate proposal in the first place that deals with reducing class size? No.

By the way, colleagues, I have been to too many high schools where students tell me that they are in classes with 45 students. I was in a Los Angeles meeting with some wonderful high school students. They said, ''Part of the problem is we are not even missed. Nobody even knows we are there.'' The school is so overcrowded, the class size is so large, how can any teacher do a good job with 45 students in a class?

Is there anything here that reduces class size? No. Is there anything here that will help make schools safer? No. Is there anything in this legislation that will help train teachers to use new technologies? No. Is there anything in this piece of legislation that will invest in some funding for summer institutes where teachers can meet, compare notes, fire one another up, talk about new ways of teaching and learning? No. Is there anything in this education proposal, or what my colleagues call an education proposal that deals with the learning gap that tries to come to terms with students, by the time they come to kindergarten they are ready to learn; she knows how to spell her name; she knows the alphabet; he knows colors, shapes and sizes; he has been read to widely, and they have that readiness to learn? No. Is there anything in what is called this education legislation that makes a commitment to early childhood development? No. Is there anything in this legislation that helps working families—after all, as my colleague from Massachusetts said, it is their taxpayer money—is there anything in this legislation that speaks to the ordeal that so many young families go through?

I thought we had made some progress. But we really haven't. When Sheila and I were first married, age 19—I don't advise that, by the way, for everyone; we had our first child when we were barely 20, about a year and a half later, David. We had hardly any money. I do advise it—we have been married 35 years; it can work well. My

point is—as I get myself in more trouble as I speak—we had our child David, and we hardly had any income. After, I think, six weeks, Sheila had to go back to work.

Now we have family medical leave, but it is unpaid leave. If you don't have much money, you have to work. It was a wrenching experience, a wrenching experience to not be able to spend more time with your infant. She had to work, and I was a student and I was working. So then what happens? As it turns out, we look for what we can afford. There was a woman, a child-care giver, and she takes care of children, and we take him to her. We thought she would be good. But then after a couple of days of picking him up and he was just sort of limp, he had no expression in his face, and he had been so lively before, so we don't know what has happened. So I drop by this home in the middle of the day, and I see all these infants in playpens with pacifiers. They are not being picked up. They are not being touched. I felt so guilty I called my mom and dad and said I am going to quit school; I am going to work. I can't have him put in this situation. And we got some help from my parents. They were able to help us. I don't know how they did it on their income.

Do you think that young parents who have the same experience today like the fact that they know they have no other choice but to drop their infant off in a child-care center? They know that maybe the people there aren't real well trained. People make precious little money that are involved in this area, but what choice do they have? They can't afford $12,000 a year if they have two small children.

Is there anything in this piece of legislation or anything my Republican colleagues are doing in this session, in the Senate, that speaks to this question of how parents can do better by their children; how we can make sure that children come to kindergarten, ready to learn? That is a big education initiative. The answer is no. What do we have instead? $1.7 billion over 5 years, amounting to about $7 per family, and that is called a major education initiative?

Is there anything in this piece of legislation that speaks to afterschool care? Let's have some sympathy with parents—single parents or both parents. Do you think parents like the fact that their 11-year-old—it is astounding, and I forget the percentage, how many 11 and 12-year-olds are home alone; it is a very high percentage. Do you think the parents like the fact they both have to work—they have no other choice—in order to have income. Some of them are working two jobs. They don't even have enough time to be with their children at home they are working so hard.

Do you think a person likes the fact that his or her daughter age 11 or age 7, goes home alone and watches trash TV talk shows and eats junk food and there is nobody to take care of them? Do you think a parent likes the fact when we hear so many things that are not so good that happen between 3 o'clock in the afternoon and 6 p.m.—do you think the parents like that? Wouldn't they like to have some really good school programs, some community programs, where their kids could be doing positive things and wouldn't be home alone, and the only reason they are home alone is because both parents have to work? No, they don't like it. So why don't we help these parents with a real education initiative. There is not a thing in this piece of legislation that deals with that at all.

Mr. President, I have to say that this proposal, which is supposed to be the major education initiative of the Republican Party, provides help in inverse relationship to need, does zero for public education, does practically zero for working families, doesn't represent a step forward, but represents a great leap backward. The President is right to veto this piece of legislation. We must start all over again.

I will just say to my colleagues that I think you are playing with fire. You are playing with fire with a piece of legislation that you tout as a major education reform bill that does next to nothing to make sure that we expand educational opportunity for all of our children in our country.

I thought that children were 100 percent of our future. So I want to know, colleagues, where is our commitment to making sure that there is really good care for children before they even get to kindergarten? Where is our commitment to making sure if we are to follow the advice of all these studies that are coming out, all of this medical evidence about the development of the brain, to make sure that children have really good developmental child care? The answer is there is no commitment here. My colleagues in the majority of the Republican Party have no initiative at all.

Where is the commitment to rebuild the crumbling schools and to have the teacher training and to have smaller class size and to make sure that the Internet and all this new technology means that all the schools are wired and teachers know how to work with it and children and young people become literate in this area? The answer is there is no commitment whatsoever.

Mr. President, I have come to the floor to speak against this piece of legislation. I hope my colleagues will vote against it. I hope the President will veto it. Then we must come back to education again.

Colleagues, it is not enough to be giving speeches about this. I apply that to myself, as well. It is not enough to have photo opportunities with small children. We all love to have our pictures taken with children. It is not enough to be in the schools once in a while. And it is not enough to say that young people are our future. If we don't make the commitment, backed by solid legislation, with resources to get to communities so we can do well for all the children in our country, then from my point of view, we will not have been honest. We will not have done all that we should do. By the way, when I say ''honest,'' I don't mean as in personally honest. Senator COVERDELL, the author of this bill, is a friend and I respect him. But I think in terms of the effect of this, it doesn't honestly reach children in our country; it doesn't honestly contribute to public education; it doesn't honestly contribute to the education of the vast majority of young people in the United States of America. Therefore, colleagues ought to vote against it.

Mr. President, how much time do we have left?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has approximately 30 minutes remaining.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, before reserving the balance of our time, I want to just comment on one other matter, which I have tried to speak on every week.

I ask unanimous consent that I may speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF JAMES HORMEL

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, it has been—I am trying to remember now—almost a year since James Hormel was voted out of Foreign Relations Committee by a 16–2 vote. I have said this a number of times on the floor of the Senate, and I want to keep saying it.

James Hormel, I think, is eminently qualified to be Ambassador to Luxembourg. He has a very, very, very distinguished record as an educator, as a businessman, as a philanthropist, and as somebody who has given to many, many communities in our country. I see no reason whatsoever why we do not have an up-or-down vote on this on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

Mr. President, I have said it to colleagues directly. I don't say it indirectly. I want to make terribly sure that the reason Mr. James Hormel's nomination has not been brought to the floor is not because of discrimination against him because of his sexual orientation. I hope that is not the case, but I do believe that we need to have an honest discussion about this nomination. We need to have a full-scale debate, and we need to have an up-or-down vote.

I think we should judge people by the content of their character. I think we should judge people by their vision and by their leadership ability. It is my fervent hope that the majority leader will bring this nomination to the floor. I have said that I am looking for a vehicle—we have things kind of snarled up here right now—on which to bring an amendment out that in one way or another will put an even sharper focus on this question.