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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECESS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now stand in recess until 2:30 p.m. today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 1:53 p.m., recessed until 2:30 p.m.; whereupon, the Senate reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer [Mr. ROBERTS].

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1997

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. JEFFORDS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending business is amendment No. 241, which has been offered to S. 717.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I understand the Senator from Washington desires to speak shortly.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I want to take a moment to explain where we are. We have one amendment pending, the Gregg amendment, which has been offered and which we all would love to do. Again, I want to explain to my colleagues why we are in a position where it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to accept any amendments, notwithstanding how much we would like to do so.

The House will be passing in the morning the same bill, identical. We hope to pass here the same bill. The reason for that is one that is hard to explain because I don't like to have this kind of a situation. But as I explained this morning to my colleagues, last year, we came very close to passing the bill which was almost identical to what we have, but we have made some changes to reconcile some of the problems that were raised. At the time, we tried to do that, the word got out and erroneous statements were made about it. This is such a volatile area, where you are dealing with young people with disabilities and educational settings and the concept of mainstreaming and all these things. It is a very emotional subject. The whole thing fell apart.

What we have done this year with the leadership in the Senate pulling together, with David Hoppe and the groups from all over the country, we finally reached, the other night, the final, final agreement. Everybody is holding hands. Notwithstanding that, there are people today spreading incorrect information around the country that certain things have happened and people are getting concerned. We are trying to make sure we don't have any opportunity for this bill to fall apart. It is so important, so emotional, and so difficult, so we are trying to do that. At times, I will have to speak against things that I agree with. We have the Gregg amendment pending right now. It is a concept I think everybody in the Senate agrees with. In fact, they voted 93 to 0 to do what he wants to do some time ago on the Goals 2000 bill. To do that again would create a problem. I have already announced my support for us to reach the goal of 40 percent to fund the total cost of problems with disabilities in this bill.

We started off when we passed it back in 1975 with funding at 12 percent. It went down as low as about 5 percent. We are now back up to about 8 percent, around the efforts of Senator GREGG, primarily, last year. I hope we will get that kind of a commitment. I agree with everything Senator GREGG is doing, but I have to oppose it because it would create a problem we don't want to create. With that piece of knowledge, as soon as the Senator from Washington is ready, he can speak; he has an amendment. I wanted to lay out what I will do when he is finished.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I stand before you and my colleagues here in the Senate today in a situation for which I can remember no parallel during the course of my career. It is a position with which I have struggled considerably, not just as we worked toward the scheduling of this bill, but for the course of more than the last 2 years.

I have an amendment to this bill, which I will introduce later on this afternoon, which I suspect, given the nature of this debate, has very little chance of acceptance. I will oppose this bill as one that I consider imposes not only an unfunded but an unwarranted mandate literally on every school district, every school director, every school administrator, every teacher in the public school systems of the United States.

At the same time, Mr. President, I want to pay heartfelt tribute to the distinguished Senator from Vermont, who is managing the bill, to the distinguished junior Senator from Tennessee, who has perhaps spent more time on it during his 2-plus years in the U.S. Senate than he has on any other issue and, probably, than any other Senator has in that time. From their perspective—and it is a valid perspective—this bill represents a substantial step in the right direction from the current Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

It represents a careful balancing on their part of the many, the strong, the articulate lobbies on each side of the disability issues that surround this bill. In fact, it represents an exquisite compromise dealing effectively with at least some of the interests of every group involved in public education, except for the students and the quality of education that they are provided in our public schools.

Education may be the single issue with the highest degree of prominence that will be discussed during the course of this Congress. The President has made both some real progress and far more rhetorical progress in bringing the quality of education provided for our students today, as they move into their lives in the 21st century, than he has on any other issue. This bill, however, has not played a significant part in that rhetoric. And almost nothing in the drafting or the debate over this bill has concerned itself with the overall quality of education that will be provided to the great mass of our young people as they move into an increasingly competitive world and increasingly competitive environment.

No, Mr. President, this bill is aimed, as is its predecessor, at a relatively small, though growing—and I will speak to the nature of that growth a little later—element in our population who are subject to a number of disabilities. Like so many of our other statutes in many other fields, its focus is so narrow that it avoids entirely, or interferes with, the overall quality of education provided to all of our young people, together with the rights of those who are closest to those young people—their parents, their teachers, their school administrators, their elected school board members—to make judgments about how best to provide the best possible education for the largest number of students. We hear soaring rhetoric about the need for higher educational standards as we move into the 21st century. But, Mr. President, I regret to say that this bill will not help us in any way in providing those higher standards. In fact, it will increasingly interfere with and frustrate their attainment. And yet, I must return to the very real tribute and credit that ought to be paid to those on the committee of jurisdiction who have drafted this, not on a blank slate, but on the slate that has been inscribed with the current IDEA.

Some of the remarks that I will make during the course of this debate, coming from individual parents or