

may report that there seems to be more interest in debating this issue in a number of different guises than there is of any other part of the Interior appropriations bill. I, obviously, will be here for the day. I hope I am accompanied by the great majority of those who wish to speak on the issue.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BINGAMAN. Madam President, what is the business before the Senate?

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under a previous order, there will be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for 10 minutes each.

OPPOSITION TO THE GORTON AMENDMENT

Mr. BINGAMAN. Madam President, I wanted to speak first today about this Gorton amendment that we adopted yesterday as part of the Labor and Human Services appropriation measure.

The Senate approved that amendment by a narrow vote of 51 to 49. And the effect of the amendment is to convert billions of dollars in Federal education funds into unrestricted block grants that go to school districts, and with very few restrictions or accountability for how the funding is spent. I think the amendment is extremely far-reaching, and it was a mistake by the Senate to go along with this amendment. I hope very much that, in the final analysis in the conference, we can drop the amendment and send to the President a bill that keeps intact the various programs that many of us have worked for on both the Democratic and Republican side of the aisle for many years.

Let me just say, putting it in its baldest terms, that this amendment would eliminate much of the U.S. Department of Education. That is a radical and a misguided effort, which does not have strong public support. This is an issue that was discussed in the last Presidential campaign. It became clear, I believe, during the course of that campaign and in the polling that was done throughout the campaign and since, that the American public does not favor elimination of the Department of Education, either in a formal way or by the gutting of the Department through an amendment such as this.

I have fundamental problems with the notion that there is no national interest in helping parents and schools and students to compete in the world

economy. What we are saying is that the local schools in every part of this country can figure out how to prepare their students to compete in the international marketplace if they have no help from outside. I disagree with that. It is not realistic to expect a local school board to have at its disposal the resources and expertise that we can develop at the national level and provide as assistance in the educational process.

So there is an honest disagreement here about whether we as a nation can step up to this responsibility and assist States and local school districts, or whether we need to stay completely out of it. I feel very much that we need to provide assistance and expertise where we can.

The Secretary of Education, in a quotation in the morning paper, says very clearly—this is Secretary Riley in the Washington Post:

Secretary Riley warned that the Senate's action, which he called a "back-door attempt to kill the Department of Education" would abolish many vital programs for students, including Clinton's Goals 2000 grants for school reform.

Madam President, when you look at the roughly \$12.5 billion in annual funding for Federal education programs that would go into block grants under this amendment, you see how broad-based this amendment is. Let me just go through the list so the people know what we are talking about here.

First of all, there is the Goals 2000 program that, of course, has been somewhat controversial, but has been a great benefit to many school districts in my State. I go to school district after school district as I travel around New Mexico and talk to those school district administrators and teachers and students about the Goals 2000 program. I find good support for it. I think they appreciate the funding they have received and the assistance that the Federal Government provides. So it would be eliminated.

The School-to-Work Program. The education funds involved in the School-to-Work Program—not the Department of Labor funds, but the Education Department funds—would be eliminated.

Education technology. This has been a concern of mine and of many Senators for many years now as to how do we get additional resources to our schools and to our school districts so that they can put in place the various purchasing of hardware and software and training of teachers that is necessary for them to turn out a technologically literate group of graduates at the end of the high school experience.

Star Schools Program, the regional technology education consortia, the telecommunications demonstration programs that are in place around the country, the challenge grants for technology innovation, technology literacy challenge fund—all of these are specific initiatives that have benefited my State significantly.

I think it would be a major error for us to eliminate the Federal funds.

Some will say we are not eliminating Federal funds, we are giving a block grant to the school districts and if they want to spend them on this, they can. The unfortunate reality is that a local school district is under tremendous pressure. The school board members in my State are elected, as they are throughout most of the country. They are under tremendous pressure at the local level to raise salaries, raise salaries for school administrators, to build additional facilities, and to do a whole range of things. If we want funds to go to improve technological literacy and provide educational technology for our schools, we have to specify that is what the money goes for. Otherwise, the reality is that it will be spent for other purposes.

So this Gorton amendment eliminates any requirement that any funds be spent for this purpose. I think that would be a major mistake. In my own State, we have received, this year, about \$1.7 million in Federal funds for educational technology. We are expected, this next year, to receive \$3.5 million in funds. The total, nationwide, is \$425 million. I think this is money well spent. It is cost-effective. It is a cost-effective way for the taxpayers to try to assist in improving education at the local level.

Let me go through some of the others that are covered here. The Eisenhower professional development State grants. These are funds that go to assist teachers in getting additional training so that they can better teach and remain in the profession of teaching. The innovative education program strategies under title 6. The safe and drug-free schools program. Again, in my State, I have gone to many schools and they have been extremely appreciative that the safe and drug-free schools program has allowed them to hire counselors to work at the middle school level, so that when students are beginning to get into difficulties with drugs or beginning to lose interest in school and become truant, they can have counselors there to be an early prevention device to keep those students involved. That safe and drug-free schools money would be eliminated under this amendment.

The magnet schools assistance. That, again, has been very helpful in many school districts around the country. Education for homeless children and youth. Women's educational equity funding. Education for native Hawaiians. Alaska Native education equity funding. Charter schools funding. Funding for Indian education. All of these are specific programs that will not be funded if this amendment prevails. So, clearly, I think we have a major problem. Bilingual and immigration education programs are another example.

The key part of this amendment that I think is most objectionable is that it creates an unmonitored windfall to local school districts that would be used for any of a wide range of purposes. There would be no oversight, no