six times the national average. Probably some Members of this Senate are in that statistic in Ward 3.

We have to ask ourselves, is it fair, given the factual indictment of the status quo of the D.C. public schools—which, as I said, over and over again today, we are spending a half a billion dollars and working with General Becton in all sorts of ways to fix it—is it fair for us to force the disenfranchised, not by reason of law, not by reason of the God-given potential of each and every one of their children, are we going to force them to go to schools that we ourselves, and in fact that statistics show that most D.C. public schoolteachers, will not risk sending their own children to?

I say to my colleagues, as you wrestle with that question, I want to leave you with the wisdom of a Nigerian proverb that I saw on the wall of a D.C. school that I visited recently. It said, ''To not know is bad; to not want to know is worse.'' We can no longer profess not to know about what is happening to thousands of children in the D.C. public school system today who the superintendent of the school system says are in a school system that will not be what we want it to be for 5 or 10 years.

We cannot profess any longer not to know this reality. Therefore, for us not to act now, frankly, is not to want to know. And the terror of that is that for that willful ignorance, it is these children who are going to pay the price. So I have spoken strongly here today because I feel strongly about this.

Mr. President, this is about kids, this is about their future, this is about the reality of the American dream for those who have the hardest time of reaching for it. This is a small program—$7 million—to try it out.

Hey, can anybody say that things are so good in the District of Columbia Public School System that it is not worth experimenting with an alternative for a couple of years? No. I hope my colleagues will think about this and will face the reality and will give this scholarship program a chance, which is to say, that they will give 4,000 children in the District of Columbia a chance that they will otherwise not have.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

Mr. COATS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. INHOFE). The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. I have three unanimous-consent requests the leader has requested. And I know the Senator from Minnesota has been very patient. And if I could just get these in I would appreciate it.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—CONFERENCE REPORT TO ACCOMPANY H.R. 2266

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 4:30 p.m. today, the Chair lay before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 2266, the Defense appropriations bill. I further ask unanimous consent that the conference report be considered read and there be 60 minutes of debate on the report, divided as follows: Senator STEVENS for 10 minutes, Senator INOUYE for 10 minutes, Senator MCCAIN for 10 minutes, Senator ROBERTS for 10 minutes, Senator COATS for 15 minutes, and Senator REED for 5 minutes. I also ask unanimous consent that following that debate, the Senate proceed to a vote on the adoption of the conference report with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE NOMINATION

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that immediately following the vote on the DOD appropriations conference report, the Senate go into Executive Session and proceed to a vote on the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 165, the nomination of Katherine Hayden, to be U.S. District judge for the district of New Jersey. I further ask unanimous consent that immediately following that vote, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, any statements relating to the nomination appear at that point in the RECORD, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then return to legislative session.

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

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

MODIFICATION TO AMENDMENT NO. 1249

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, there has been either a printing error or technical omission in the current pending amendment—the line 22 on page 34 was omitted, as well as line 23. It simply is a section reference describing the language that follows in the section, plus the line ''Notwithstanding any other provision of law.'' Everything else is as submitted. And it is a technical change to offset a printing error.

I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be modified to reflect this change.

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

The modification is as follows:

On page 34, strike lines 7 through 16, and insert in lieu:

SEC. 13. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This title shall be effective for the period beginning on the day after the date of enactment of this Act and ending on September 30, 2002.

SEC. 14. OFFSET.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law—

(1) the total amount of funds made available under this Act under the heading ''FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE OPERATIONS OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL'' to repay the accumulated general fund deficit shall be $23,000,000; and

(2) $7,000,000 of the funds made available under this Act under the heading ''FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE OPERATIONS OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL'' shall be used to carry out the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997''.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, the last item, which has already been approved, apparently has not been checked by staff. What was the last unanimous consent, if you would not mind? You already have gotten it approved, but out of courtesy. Apparently, the Democrats have not had a chance to look at it.

Mr. COATS. I thought it was cleared. It is a printing error, a descriptive—I tell you what. We will talk to them about it. If there is any problem, we will reset that.

Mr. WELLSTONE. That will be fine.

Mr. President, I first of all want to start out with some praise for my colleague, Senator COATS, from Indiana and for that matter, Senator LIEBERMAN. I think they speak with a great deal of conviction and eloquence on this matter. I think both of them are very committed to the idea of equal opportunity for every child in America. There is no question about that in my mind.

Mr. President, I too think that there has to be a way that we reinvigorate or renew our national vow of equal opportunity for every child. And I think that education is key to that.

But, Mr. President, let me just say at the beginning that there are a whole lot of things that we can and should be doing that we are not doing if we are serious about it. And that is sort of the context that I look at this proposal for the District of Columbia, which I will get to in a few minutes. But let me start out, if you will, with a kind of nationwide focus.

First of all, Mr. President, I have been traveling the country and I have been spending time in communities where people are struggling economically. I spent time with quite a few poor people around our country.

I am struck by the fact—and I have said this on the floor of the Senate before—that in all too many cases you walk into schools and the ceilings are caving in and the toilets do not work, the buildings are dilapidated, the lab facilities are not up to par, there are not enough textbooks. And with all due respect, quite frankly, until we make the investment in this area, just in infrastructure so schools are inviting places for children, we are not doing that much for kids. A voucher plan, be it a demonstration project in the District of Columbia for $7 million or anything else is just a great leap sideways or backward.

Mr. President, Senators and Representatives have had the opportunity to put some investment in rebuilding crumbling schools in America, and we voted against it. If we are serious about equal opportunity for every child—my colleague from Connecticut spoke about this with a great deal of eloquence—then we ought to just follow the direction of all of the studies that are coming out about early childhood development. It is not surprising that kids are not doing well in these different tests, in the way in which we measure how children are doing in our schools.

I try to be in a school every 2 weeks in Minnesota. There are so many children that come to schools that have never been read to. There are so many children that come to school that don't know the alphabet, don't know how to spell their name, don't know colors, shapes, and sizes, and we are doing precious little by way of investing in early childhood development.

Now, I don't know how in the world my colleagues believe that the children we say we care a great deal about, and they do, are going to do well unless we make a commitment here. The answer to the problem is not a voucher plan. The answer is to make the commitment to early childhood development.

Deborah Meyer, a great urban educator from New York, said, ''We can have a debate about tests, we can have a debate about standards, we can have a debate about how we measure this, but there is no debate about the need for you all to get busy investing in the dilapidated schools.'' We tell children we care next to nothing about them when the schools look the way they are.

The judge's court order in Washington, DC, which dealt with getting the asbestos out of our schools, there could be judges issuing these orders in just about every major city in the United States of America, and we haven't invested the resources in this, and we are now saying that the answer is vouchers?

Mr. President, if we are going to talk about equal opportunity for every child, maybe we ought to take a look at what happens to children before they go to school and what happens to them when they go home. Some of the cuts we have made in nutrition programs—and we have made rather deep cuts in nutrition programs; we are going to cut the major food safety program, the major safety net, which is the Food Stamp Program, by 20 percent by the year 2002 all in the name of welfare reform.

Or, Mr. President, the cuts we have made in affordable housing. Has anybody looked at some of the homes, some of the apartments, some of the housing that these young children live in? And we are cutting funding for affordable housing. We have a lot of kids that are living in shacks. We have a lot of kids that are living in rat-infested apartments. We have a lot of children that go cold during the winter.

My colleagues are trying to make the argument that the voucher plan is the way we are going to make sure that these children do well. We do hardly anything to change the concerns and circumstances of their lives outside of the schools. We do hardly anything by way of early childhood development. We do next to nothing when it comes to rebuilding these crumbling schools. And then we turn around and say what we want to do is have a voucher plan.

Mr. President, my colleague from Connecticut said that he had been in some schools. I have been in some of the schools. I know Senator COATS has. I don't know anybody that has done more travel around the country than Jonathan Kozol who wrote ''Savage Inequalities: Children in America's schools.''

I read from page 83: ''In a country where there is no distinction of class,'' written of the United States 130 years ago, ''a child is not born to the station of his parents but with an infinite claim to all of the prizes that could be won by thought and labor. It is in conformity with the theory of equality as near as possible to give to every youth an equal state of life. Americans are unwilling that any be deprived in childhood the means of competition.''

It is hard to read these words today without a sense of irony and sadness, denial. Means of competition is perhaps the single most consistent outcome of the education offered to poor children in the schools of our large cities, and nowhere is this pattern of denial more explicit or more absolute than public schools in New York City. Average expenditures per pupil in the city of New York were under $5,500, and in the suburbs you have funding levels that are above $11,000 a year, and some cases up to $15,000 a year.

All across the country, too much of the education the children get by way of teacher recruitment and teacher salaries, by way of facilities, by way of teacher training, by way of support services, is dependent on the property tax—huge inequalities—and we think that the voucher plan is the way to deal with this problem?

My good friend Jonathan Kozol wrote another book called ''Amazing Grace,'' poor children and the conscience of America. It is a difficult book to read. It is devastating. It is about children in New York City in the Bronx. Mr. President, the thesis of the book is that no country that really loved children would ever let any group of children grow up under these conditions.

Looking at the housing in the neighborhoods, the rat-infested housing, looking at the pollution, looking at the number of children suffering from asthma, looking at the lead content still in the paints in the apartments, looking at families without jobs, without jobs that pay a decent wage, looking at children that are malnourished, looking at a school that doesn't get its fair shake of resources, why don't we make those commitments if we want to make sure that every child has the same chance? The voucher plan nationally and this voucher plan in the District of Columbia is not the answer. It is not a step forward. It is a great leap backward from the kind of commitment we ought to make to children in our country.

Mr. President, I said to my colleague from Indiana and I meant it sincerely, we don't need to be starting to put public money into private schools. We have some of the best public schools in the world. We have some of the best public schools in the world. Go out to some of our suburbs and look at those schools. They are great schools with great teachers with great facilities. What we should be doing is making all the public schools that good. That is the commitment we ought to make.

One-third of America's schools, serving 14 million of America's 52 million students, are considered deteriorating, according to the Department of Education. Ten million students don't have access to computers; 50 percent of the teachers have no experience with technology in the classroom; 50,000 teachers enter school annually on emergency basis, without a proper teaching license; and within the next decade, thanks to a retirement in the baby boom, we will need 2 million new teachers, and we are now on the floor of the Senate discussing an amendment that would provide resources to private schools.

Mr. President, Horace Mann said it best in 1830, 170 years ago:

> Choice is not a new idea . . . the newness is who pays for it. As a nation, we are rightly absorbed with improving education. We cannot do it by isolating its problems, and pretending to leave those problems behind to be dealt with by those least able to solve them. The problems of our public schools lie deep in the American experience—poverty, racism, decades of public apathy, drugs, and growing inability of the family, the church, and the neighborhood to nurture many of our children. These problems—and not the attractively sounding solution of private school choice—need to be addressed.

Mr. President, that is exactly the argument that I just made. Horace Mann just happens to be someone of quite a bit more stature. He was right in 1830 and the same argument applies today, nearly 170 years later.

You can't take public funds, you can't take public funds, and my colleague ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON informs me that indeed this $7 million comes out of the D.C. budget, you can't take public funds, precious funds, and funnel them to private schools. You have fewer dollars helping kids in math and science, you have fewer dollars in terms of raising the standards of achievement, you have fewer dollars for teacher training, and you have less prevention of drugs and violence in the schools. This is not the time to be making such a decision.

Mr. President, I want to also point out that there is a Senator from the District of Columbia, a shadow Senator, Paul Strauss, and it is a shame

that he doesn't get a chance to be more directly involved in this debate. He has been by my office a lot. He cares about this. I think this has some problem to do with the whole question of lack of representation.

I think we ought to remember that people in D.C, and my colleague from Connecticut said it was 1981, but by a ratio of 8 to 1 vote against the voucher initiative. If you want to argue that was a long time ago, take a look at the D.C. Board of Education which unanimously opposes the provision. ''Private school vouchers is not where the voters of this city want to put their money,'' D.C. School Board member Karen Shook reminds us. ''To have Congress impose this on us after we soundly voted against it runs counter to democracy.''

These are elected members to the school board. They voted unanimously one way, and we come to the floor of the Senate and impose a whole different other view. I thought we were interested in local initiative. I thought we wanted local communities to have more decisionmaking power over their children's lives and what happened in their communities.

Mr. President, I think that if we are going to be talking about improving education, the answer is right before us. We have great schools in our suburbs. We have some great schools in some of our cities. Make all the public schools that way. Make sure that we have a system of financing of schools so that not one school in America, not one school in America, is dilapidated, not one school in America has a roof that is caving in, not one school in America is ladened with asbestos, not one school in America has teachers that have to take money out of their pockets and buy textbooks for their students because there isn't enough resource to do so, not one school in America is a school without heat or without air-conditioning during the hot summers. Let's make that commitment. Let's make the commitment to early childhood development. Let's make the commitment to support services for students. Those are the kind of commitments we make, and then we can have all of the public schools being great schools. The voucher doesn't do that.

Karen Shook, the vice president of the D.C. Board of Education and former Chair of the D.C. Finance Committee said, ''Students in the District of Columbia go to school in 100-year-old buildings that have never been renovated.'' Why don't we renovate the buildings? The city has a $600 million need to repair schools, yet it has no capital budget. As for social services for troubled youth, ''only one counselor is available for every 400 students'' in the D.C. public schools.

As D.C. parent and PTA leader Alieze Stallworth points out: ''The majority of children are going to remain in the public school system. What happens to them?''

Mr. President, I could go on and on. There are other colleagues who want to speak. But let me be clear about this, take the $7 million, and for $7 million we could establish ''Success for All,'' a proven research-based reading program for disadvantaged students, for every elementary school in the District of Columbia. Put the $7 million into that.

We could link 116 public schools in the District of Columbia to improve reform efforts such as New American Schools. Put the $7 million in that.

We could put in place 140 after-school programs based in public schools to help 14,000 children otherwise home alone after schooldays, after school ends each day. Put the $7 million into that.

We could provide brandnew textbooks for every elementary and secondary school student in every single the District of Columbia school. Put the $7 million into that.

We could buy 66,000 new hardcover books for the District of Columbia's public libraries, or we could buy 368 new boilers for D.C. schools and protect all the students who go cold during the winter. Put the $7 million into that.

I am going to be very clear about it. I will try to end on another note. I think that my colleagues are onto something important. I think this amendment is a huge mistake. I think it actually represents a retreat from living up to our national vow of equal opportunity for every child. I think the focus ought to be on all of our schools and all of our children. We ought to make sure that every school in this country, including the schools in the District of Columbia and a lot of other cities in the country, and rural areas as well, are as good as the very best school in some of our wealthy suburbs that have all the resources and teachers that they can hire and all the teachers they can retain and all of the support services and all of the rest. That is the direction we ought to be going in.

The voucher plan represents a retreat from that. But I want to say to my colleagues on the floor of the Senate, these Senators, with this amendment, are operating in good faith. They are not operating in bad faith. I probably should not end this way because I am so strongly opposed to the amendment. But I really do want to sort of talk about two points that I think they are making that are important. One of them is that, although, again, the per pupil expenditure in the District of Columbia, as I look at these figures, which has been declining now, is now down to $5,923 for fiscal year 1998, that is not nearly as much as the surrounding suburbs. So I don't think we should go overboard on these figures, given the concerns and circumstances of children's lives and, in many ways, a bigger challenge to educate some of the children in the D.C. school system. Nevertheless, I think it is quite appropriate to say, when are we going to cut through this bureaucracy and when are we going to make sure that these dollars that are out there really connect to the education of children?

I think what my colleagues are trying to say is that they have grown very impatient, they are getting tired of waiting. I share that impatience. I just would do it a whole different way. I would put a lot more investment than I think they want to in what happens to kids in the early years, investment in good programs for kids when they get out of school in the middle of the day when not such good things happen. I would put a whole lot more investment in teacher training and a whole lot more investment in making sure that the best facilities and resources and the schools are inviting places. That is where I would go. I would figure out ways—and I think the District of Columbia is starting to do it—of really making this bureaucracy accountable. I would not be condemning the public school teachers—and they are not doing that. I get angry because I think some of the harshest critics of the public school teachers could not last 1 hour in the classrooms they condemn.

I spoke the other night at Howard University. In the audience was a public school teacher, and she said it is really hard to go on. They feel so beaten down from all of the bashing. I think these public school teachers do a marvelous job. I understand my colleagues' impatience.

Second, I think it is true that some of the private schools, and some of the Catholic schools in particular, in some of our innercity communities are schools where, when children come to school every day, they know they are loved and some very important things are happening. They are doing some things in their schools that we are not doing nearly as well as we should do in some of our public schools. It can't be said that children in our public schools, or in near enough public schools, feel as if every day they are loved and they are supported. There are some important things going on in the Catholic schools. There are important things going on in some of these other schools that I think make a huge difference.

But, Mr. President, this voucher plan, in the context of what is happening nationally, and even in the context of what is happening in the District of Columbia, however well-intentioned it is, I think does not represent a step forward. I think it represents a great leap backward from equity. It represents a great leap backward from the idea of truly equal opportunity for every child, and it represents the beginning of a great leap backward from a commitment to public schools, where all of the schools and all of the children represent the best of America, which is opportunity, which is good education, education that fires up young people, that gives them hope that they can do well in their lives. That is the direction we ought to go. This voucher proposal, in the District of Columbia or anywhere else, doesn't take us in that direction.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COATS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I would like to yield myself 3 minutes to briefly respond to the Senator. I know the Senator from Rhode Island has been waiting patiently. I don't want to take away from his opportunity. We have speakers on our side, too. The Senator from Rhode Island is next in line.

I want to respond to some comments made by the Senator from Minnesota, to whom I want to return the compliment. The Senator from Minnesota has been passionate in his efforts to reach out to the disadvantaged in this country and address many of their concerns. I know he comes at this issue—even though it is different from where I come in terms of the solution, I think the goals are the same for both of us. I know he comes at it from a different perspective, but with great sincerity, and he matches his sincerity and his rhetoric with his actions. I noted that the Senator came and paid rapt attention to particularly the comments by the Senator from Connecticut, Senator LIEBERMAN. Senator WELLSTONE and I have discussed this and have exchanged our views. I just appreciate the Senator's commitment to this and his sincerity about that commitment.

I would like to comment on a couple of things briefly. There have been different figures thrown around here about per pupil spending in the District of Columbia. We have tried mightily to find out the exact figures. Estimates range from $10,000 to $5,000, as the Senator has mentioned. It is probably somewhere in between. One of the sad things about the D.C. Public School System is that they can't tell us. The accounting is so bad in the District of Columbia—whether it is on roads, housing, police salaries, or public schools—they can't tell us how much they spend per pupil. They can't even tell us the number of pupils. We said, ''We know how much we give you; tell us the number of pupils you are educating, and we will divide that into how much we give you.'' They say, ''We don't know exactly. We can't tell you the number of pupils.'' That is kind of a sorry comment on the inefficiency and really incompetence of the D.C. Public School System as it currently exists.

Just two other things, real quickly. I want to make sure my colleagues know that the money—the $7 million for this program —does not take one penny out of the money allocated to the D.C. public schools for education. In fact, it will increase the money per pupil because they will have 2,000 less students to divide the pot of money they get to educate those students. The money comes from an extra appropriation over and above the President's request, and that money is specifically designated for debt reduction and doesn't go to any operating expenses. So Delegate NORTON is wrong when she says this comes out of textbooks, teacher salaries, and operating expenses. It doesn't come out of operating expenses; not one penny less will go to D.C. schools.

Finally, let me just say the Senator seems to imply that if we can't fix it all, we should not fix anything. We acknowledge that there are a lot of things that need to be fixed in the District of Columbia and around this country. Housing is in deplorable shape, roads are in deplorable shape, early childhood education probably could use funds, food stamps and, as he said, fix the buildings, and so forth. Well, we are not able to do everything, but we are able to do something, something that is focused not on fixing roofs, not on collateral problems—and they are problems that need to be addressed—but we are able to funnel funds directly to parents and students who can improve their educational opportunities. As important as it is to fix roofs, buildings, infrastructure, and so forth, more important and the highest priority ought to be to provide education to those children so that they then can become part of the solution.

Maybe this 3 percent will become part of the 100 percent solution, if they can get an education that would allow them to participate in this. If we were talking about public housing, which is in a disastrous state in this country, particularly in this city, and someone came along with an alternative that was tried elsewhere and would really improve the housing situation, and we said, can we test it here to see if it works here and it will improve housing for those 2,000 people? would you say, no, if we can't do the whole thing, we are not going to do it for anybody?

All we are asking for is a test that will help 2,000 kids get a better education, but will prove, right or wrong, whether or not school choice is a viable opportunity and viable program to do two things: First, give kids a chance and, second, put pressure on the public school system to reform and change. They have had decades to do this. We keep talking about these alternate solutions, but it doesn't happen. In the meantime, generations of children are being condemned to an inadequate education.

Mr. President, how much time is available on each side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana has 64 minutes. The opposition has 74 minutes.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, we had said Senator REED, who was waiting, is next. We are not exactly alternating because we didn't have people available on both sides. If we can get back to the alternating system, we would be happy to do that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

Mr. REED. I yield myself such time, under the control of Senator KENNEDY, as I may consume.

I rise this afternoon in opposition to the Coats-Lieberman amendment. I have sensed from the comments of the Senator from Indiana and the Senator from Connecticut that they, too, share our mutual frustration with the status of public schools in the United States and particularly in the District of Columbia. That frustration is forcing us to look at ways in which we can improve education because we believe it is so vitally important to the future of the young people of America and indeed to the very success of America in the future.

I don't think this frustration should cloud our vision as to what we are doing if we would adopt an amendment such as is proposed today. I believe it would represent an abandonment of public education, not a reform of public education. I feel very strongly that our first commitment should be to a strong system of public education throughout this Nation, that we should be seeking to make school reform and excellent schools the right of every child and not just those who may be fortunate enough to receive some type of voucher to leave the system.

Indeed, we can ask ourselves, even if this measure should pass and 2,000 children would leave the public education system in the District of Columbia, what about the thousands of children remaining? What have we done to make their lives better and their education better? I don't think we can save a few and sacrifice the many. I think what we have to do is sit down, conscientiously and cooperatively, and reform public education, not abandon it.

Now, the District of Columbia, as we all know, has stark educational needs. Their class year was delayed for days and days and days, not because of anything more complicated than the fact that the buildings were in disrepair. Yet, rather than investing in roofs or boilers or those items that would actually put children literally into the classroom, we are now debating a voucher bill that would take some of those resources that could be available for these activities and disburse them to private education. Indeed, I believe we have a special obligation here in the Nation's Capital to ensure that the schools are the best in the country. However, we are not talking about that today. Instead, we are talking about allowing 2,000 students to leave that system, rather than talking about how we can make every school in the District of Columbia the best in this country and in the world, and how we can give every child in the District of Columbia the chance to succeed educationally so that they can succeed in life.

The amendment offered by Senators COATS and LIEBERMAN brings the issue of the quality of education, particularly education in many of our urban areas, clearly into focus. For that, we thank them. It is a crisis we must address, but a crisis that I believe is not solved by vouchers. Vouchers would take the limited resources necessary to improve, reform, and reinvigorate public education and, instead, allow some students to leave the system.

Indeed, as part of this amendment which is being debated today there is absolutely no requirement that schools accepting the vouchers would also have to accept the great task of public education, which is to educate all students regardless of their abilities, regardless of their proficiency in the English language, regardless of discipline problems or troubles they may have. This is the task we set for public education. That is not the task that is frequently embraced or supported by private education.

In Cleveland, which has a voucher program, no students with disabilities are served. 1,460 students, nearly half of those that were given the vouchers, could not even find a private school that would accept them. The essence of a private school very clearly is they get to reject students, and they get to reject them on very subjective grounds. That is the nature of private education. That does not apply, obviously, to public education. Public education not only must accept every child but has a moral and legal requirement to serve those children as best they can. And that is a significant difference.

Private education works very, very well. It has provided good education to many Americans. I was a student in parochial schools in Rhode Island. But one thing that was true then and is true now when I talk to parents is that, if your child has a particular difficulty or disability, if your child needs enhanced care, specialized attention, the first choice is specifically the public schools because the public school not only has the obligation but will make available those resources as best they can. And, once again, in the arena of private schools it is not because of any ill-will but simply because of the fact that they just do not have to do that.

So we are talking about a system in which there is not equality, not equality admission, and in many cases not equality of resources either.

We have to support the mission of public education in the United States, and it is not just about training workers for the world economy. It is not just preparing young people to engage in the technologically challenging world of the next century. It is also about Americans, because one of the hallmarks of our country has always been that we have a system of public education that is a common ground for the American people—that children of all races, children of different national heritage, children of different religious convictions can come and be educated in a place that emphasizes not their differences but their common status as citizens of this great Republic.

We are in danger perhaps of losing that. We are in danger because there is a great deal of skepticism about the effectiveness of public education in the United States. And, looking at the record, one should be skeptical. But we should not respond to that skepticism and that frustration today by turning our back on public education. Rather, we should look at the way we can make public education better for all students. What we should be thinking about and talking about and enacting is tough academic standards in public education.

How do we involve parents and the community more deeply and more intimately in the lives and schools in the neighborhood? How do we make schools safe and drug free? How do we bring technology into every classroom? And how do we ensure that every classroom is a place that is structurally sound, clean, and creates an environment where young people want to learn and want to strive to get ahead?

The notion of school choice in the public education system is a good one. Parents should have some flexibility within the public system to pick out charter schools, magnet schools, or special schools. Those types of schools help stimulate innovation and improvement in the public system.

In my home State of Rhode Island we are fortunate to have several different schools, particularly at the secondary level which draw on the special talents and special skills of the students and which give parents and students a choice. But when we start moving away from that system of public education into funded private education, funded now by these vouchers, we are stepping across a boundary which I think we will regret because inevitably we will be pulling resources away from the needed improvements and reforms in public education, and we will see our schools deteriorate even further.

There is a better way to reform education.

If you look at schools which have the same basic demographic characteristics, one of the most persuasive comments that I have seen is that the difference in performance between a good school and a bad school is most accounted for by the qualifications of their teachers. We are not talking about dealing with that issue of teacher preparation here today. We are skirting it, where, in fact, I think if we have scarce Federal dollars, and, indeed, we do have scarce Federal dollars in every category of expenditures, we have to look at where we can get our best value. And it is not balanced. It would be better spent, I feel, in improving the quality of teaching in our public schools.

I introduced legislation—the Teacher Excellence in America Challenge Act, the TEACH Act—which would turn around the model of professional development and training in the United States to provide for better teachers. This legislation is based upon an extensive study by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, which contains some disheartening statistics about the quality and preparation of teachers in America.

Over 12 percent of newly hired teachers have no training; 23 percent of all secondary teachers do not have even a minor in their main teaching field; and in schools with the highest minority enrollment, students have less than a 50 percent chance of getting a science or mathematics teacher who holds a license and degree in his or her field of teaching.

These are the real problems of public education. These problems have to be addressed. And we can address them, and we must address them. If we do that we will be on much firmer ground in improving public education.

What is the price tag, as estimated by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, for improving the quality of teachers throughout this country? It is over $4 billion. It may seem inconsequential today. We are debating a very small program with respect to the District of Columbia.

But we need all the resources we can to meet the greater challenge of preparing our teachers and the greater challenge of simply ensuring that school buildings are suitable and safe for children.

To turn away from these challenges and to adopt this amendment is, I believe, the wrong approach.

I believe we have a lot to do to improve public education. We have the necessary task ahead of us to improve teaching, to improve the school environment, and to challenge schools with demanding standards.

I also hope that this body will adopt a national evaluation system so that schools know where they stand, and so that when we talk about how well a school is doing it is not just anecdotal, but we will actually know how well they are doing.

In fact, I hope that the national evaluations would be participated in by both public and private schools so we can make a judgment about how well the public schools are doing versus private schools. I think we would be a bit surprised. I think we would find despite the disparagement, despite the criticism, despite the constant bombardment against public education, that it would stand up very well. But we all can do better, and we all must do better.

The dollars that we are talking about today are important. They should be applied to provide every student in the District of Columbia with a chance—not 2,000 lucky students—but every student in the District of Columbia. They should be focused not on retreating from our commitment to public education but to reaffirming it by assuring every child in this District, and we hope in this country, will have a good, safe school building; they will have well-prepared and motivated teachers; they will have textbooks that are current; and, they will have the chance to use all their talents not only for their own success but ultimately for the great success of this Nation.

I yield my time.

Mr. COATS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I would like to yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Missouri.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Indiana for his having made it possible for me to stand and speak in favor of this very important opportunity to demonstrate what can happen when we offer individuals the chance to have competition, or the chance to have an influence on where our children are educated.

It is one of the agreed upon successes of the United States of America that our university and college system is second to none. Students from all over the world stream into American colleges and universities, and they come here in spite of the fact that they test very, very well in elementary and secondary systems in their own lands. They come here because there is something special about the collegiate and university level in the United States.

If I were asked why our collegiate system is tops, I would say, in my judgment, that it is because it is a pluralistic system; that it is diverse. There is no singularity with it. No one is scheduled to go to one school or another. Rather, people have an opportunity to make a selection. And students compete to get into the best schools and the best schools compete for faculty. There is lots of competition in the system. It drives the system forward. It provides a basis for not only education and learning on the part of students but it really develops the energy which provides the basis for research which is expanding the frontiers of knowledge all the time.

This concept of diversity, this concept of pluralism, this concept of not being forced to be in one setting, this concept of the energy and creativity, spontaneity and quality that comes when an institution knows it has to do its best for its students because those students aren't forced to go there. They are not locked in. They have the opportunity to be involved in educational experiences elsewhere. That is what drives quality. It is what has carried American higher education to the very top of the educational mountain. There is no dispute. There is no challenger. Second place isn't even close. The United States of America is the clear dominant force in higher education because we are pluralistic, because we are diverse, and no one has a monopoly.

On the contrary, if you are a student and you have one choice and one choice alone, the word ''one'' and the word ''choice'' Is an oxymoron; that phrase together. One choice isn't a choice. It is a direction. Students that are locked into a single school don't have the capacity to say I am going to do better, I will go elsewhere. They don't have the capacity to say if you do not shape this place up, I will go elsewhere. They don't have the capacity to energize the system. A parent doesn't have the ability to go into the school and say you must do better. The school says we are the only school. You have one choice. One choice is no choice.

What we are really offering to individuals who have been locked into a school system which has failed—I think it is time for us to confess, the school system in Washington, DC, is a failure—is a plan to help energize this school system. It will help the public sector. It will help the private sector. But, most importantly, it will help students and parents.

When I had the privilege of being the Governor of my State, I was chairman of the Education Commission of the States. I followed in that responsibility one William Jefferson Clinton, who presided over the Education Commission of the States 1 year; I the next. And one of the things that became apparent in studies conducted from sea to shining sea in this country is that the single most important thing about a student's performance is whether the parents are involved in the education process. How do you get parents involved? You make them meaningful. How can you make parents meaningful in Washington, DC? You can give them the opportunity together with the student to make a choice to go to a school where their needs can be met instead of locking them into a situation where their needs aren't being met and have not been met. And it is a demonstrated fact—the studies tell it, the audits tell it, the school facilities tell it—that the needs aren't being met.

Unfortunately, our Secretary of Education has come out to oppose this program providing scholarships so that students could move from one school to another and get good training somewhere if they are not getting it where they are. And he indicated he was opposing it because he felt like it was reducing the funding.

Let me just repeat. This particular measure reduces funding not 1 cent. It adds funding to just introduce the concept of scholarships and to put into the hands of parents and students the ability to say we will go where our needs are met. Will this help the District of Columbia schools? It definitely will because they will understand they are no longer the exclusive provider of whatever it is they want to provide. They will have to start becoming the creative supplier of what it is that students need. Will it help the students? Obviously, it will help the students. It will get their parents involved. It will get them involved. It will meet their needs. And we will establish a model here in the District of Columbia, in the Nation's Capital, which in my judgment would well serve the entire country.

It is true that pluralism and diversity are the strength of this great land. They have carried our collegiate system and our research universities to the very top in education around the globe. It would be no accident if we were to allow this to happen at the elementary and secondary level. And it could happen if we were to simply embrace the opportunity of letting parents make meaningful choices. One choice is an oxymoron. One choice is no choice at all. It is a trap. It is time to free students and parents to have an opportunity to select schools that can meet their needs and do so without impairing the financial viability and capacity of the District of Columbia school system in the process.

Mr. President, I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KEMPTHORNE). Who yields time?

Mr. KENNEDY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield myself such time as I may need.

Mr. President, I oppose the voucher amendment to the District of Columbia appropriations bill. Although we all want to help the District's children get a good education, this is not the way to do it. Public funds should be used for public schools, not to pay for students to attend private and religious schools.

The current debate involves the schools in the District of Columbia. The use of Federal funds for private schools is a national issue that Congress has addressed and rejected many times before, and so have many States. Now the voucher proponents are attempting to make the D.C. public schools a guinea pig for a scheme that voters in the District of Columbia have soundly rejected, and so have voters across the country.

The recent voucher proposals in the States of Washington and Colorado and California lost by over 2 to 1 margins, and in 1981 voters defeated a voucher initiative by a ratio of 8 to 1 here in the District. The concept has never been brought up on the ballot again because it has so little support. So clearly Congress should not impose on the District of Columbia what the people of the District of Columbia and voters across the country reject.

D.C. parents and ministers and local leaders have made it clear that they do not want vouchers. Last week, a group of ministers from the District of Columbia publicly announced their opposition to vouchers. Rev. Eart Trent, Jr., of the Florida Avenue Baptist Church, said, ''We want nothing to do with vouchers. It is going to harm a majority of our schools.'' Representative ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON opposes vouchers for the District.

The question is, who wants these vouchers? The Republicans in Congress cannot get to first base with this issue in their own States and want to impose it on the people of the District of Columbia.

Vouchers would erode local control in the District of Columbia and undermine D.C. school reforms already underway. Last year, Congress created a control board and all but eliminated the locally elected school board.

This bill would create another bureaucracy in the form of a federally appointed corporation to use Federal funds to run the voucher program. Six out of the seven corporation members would be nominated by the Federal

Government, and those nominations are controlled by the Republican leaders of Congress. Only one representative of D.C. would serve on the corporation.

I understand Senator BOXER did an excellent job earlier in the debate of going through the administrative process and machinery that would be set up and the weaknesses of that particular recommendation or inclusion in the amendment.

Congress created the D.C. control board less than a year ago. The board appointed as chief executive officer of the schools Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., with Congress' endorsement. His mission is to improve the public schools. Now this bill would pull the rug out from under him.

I noted, Mr. President, that in an earlier debate one of our colleagues who is supporting the amendment was talking about the $500 million that is coming from taxpayers all over the country. That money is coming from the taxpayers here in the District of Columbia.

I haven't looked at the D.C. population recently, but generally it is larger than six or seven of our States. They pay in taxes, but they do not have representation in the House, with all respect to ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON. They are not reflected in the Senate of the United States. They are not given the full representation that they should have even in the District.

So General Becton, Mr. President, local leaders and D.C. parents are working hard to improve all D.C. public schools for all children. We should support them, not undermine them. The public funds should not go to private schools when D.C. public schools have such urgent needs. The opening of D.C. public schools for the 1997–1998 academic year was delayed because in 67 percent of the schools the roofs were crumbling. They were able to repair the most severe problems and open up the schools this week, but much more needs to be done.

In addition to completing the roof repairs, 65 percent of them have faulty plumbing; 41 percent of the schools do not have enough power outlets and electric wiring to accommodate computers and other needed technology; and 66 percent of the schools have inadequate heating, ventilation and air conditioning. Funding these repairs should be our top priority, not conducting a foolish ideological experiment on school vouchers.

Another serious problem with the private school voucher is the exclusionary policy of the private schools. Scarce Federal dollars should not go to schools that can exclude children. There is no requirement in the bill that schools receiving vouchers accept students with limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, homeless students or students with disciplinary problems.

Scarce funds should be targeted to public schools which do not have the luxury of closing their doors to students who pose such challenges. As District of Columbia parent Alieze Stallworth says, ''A lot of people think the poor kids will be able to go to the best private schools. They are fooling themselves.''

The voucher proponents argue that vouchers increase the choice for parents. But parental choice is a mirage. Private schools apply different rules than public schools, and unlike the public schools, which must accept all children, the private schools decide whether to accept a child or not. The real choice goes to the schools, not the parents. The better the private school, the more parents and students are turned away. In Cleveland, nearly half of the public school students who received the vouchers could not find a private school that would accept them.

Vouchers will not help most children who need help. This voucher scheme will send 2,000 children to private and parochial schools, but of the 78,000 children who attend D.C. public schools, 50,000 of the children, or 65 percent, come from low-income families. Thus, this proposal would provide vouchers for 3 percent of D.C.'s children and do nothing for the other 97 percent.

Again, a point that has been well made by my friend and colleague from California, Senator BOXER.

This is no way to spend Federal dollars. We should invest in strategies that help all children, not just a few.

Another serious objection to this voucher scheme is its unconstitutionality. A vast majority of private schools that charge tuition below $3,200 are religious schools. Providing vouchers to religious schools is unconstitutional. It violates the establishment clause of the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution by providing a Federal subsidy for sectarian schools. In many States, the voucher schemes would violate the State constitution, too.

In January 1997, a Wisconsin trial court held that the expansion of the Milwaukee voucher program to include religious schools was unconstitutional and violated the Wisconsin constitution. The court stated, ''We do not object to the existence of parochial schools or that they attempt to spread their beliefs through the schools. They just cannot do it with State dollars.''

On August 22, the Wisconsin State Court of Appeals affirmed by a 2 to 1 vote that the expansion of the State voucher program to include religious schools was unconstitutional under the Wisconsin constitution.

On May 1, 1997, the Ohio Tenth Appellate Court unanimously reversed the trial court's decision to allow public money to be paid to religious schools. The appellate court held that the voucher program violated the separation of church and state under both the United States and Ohio Constitutions. And the court ruled that the voucher program ''steers aid to sectarian schools, resulting in what amounts to a direct Government subsidy.''

On June 27, 1997, a Vermont State superior court held that the use of vouchers to pay tuition at private religious schools violates both the U.S. and Vermont constitutions. The courts are clear on the unconstitutionality of vouchers for religious schools, and Congress should abide by their rules, too.

These are all judgments that have been made within the last year under State constitutions and the Federal Constitution in terms of how this particular proposal would be unconstitutional.

Instead of subsidizing private schools, we need to support ways to improve and reform the public schools. That is the basic point, Mr. President. Instead of subsidizing private schools, we need to support ways to improve and reform the public schools—not in a few schools but in all schools, not for a few students but for all students. That is the challenge.

Supporting a few children at the expense of the many divides communities. The Federal Government should help rebuild communities, not undermine them. We should make investments that help all children in all the neighborhood schools to get a good, safe education. I think that is the heart of the argument against this amendment.

So far, Mr. President, in this debate, we have been focusing on this particular chart. Hopefully, we as a body could agree that we do not want to abandon our public schools; we do not want to undermine the communities. As we mentioned, this particular proposal only funds a few at the expense of many—about 3 percent of the total students. It gives scarce Federal dollars to schools that can exclude children. Unlike the public school system, private schools can exclude children. The choice is not made by the parents or the children; it is made by the schools. And we have given examples of how that is being done. We ignore the voter will. When vouchers were put to a vote here in the District of Columbia, they were rejected 8 to 1. The issue has not come up on the ballot again since then. All the public commentary by religious and other elected officials reflects that same position even today. And vouchers raise the constitutional problems which have been addressed, Mr. President, not just academically but in several States which have tried to adopt similar kinds of programs.

Many of us feel that the use of vouchers to subsidize parents who send their children to private schools is a serious mistake because it is a statement that encourages parents to abandon the public schools, not to work to improve them.

Vouchers are a bad idea for school reform, but they are far from the only idea, and what I want to do, Mr. President, is review briefly a number of the ideas that have been working here in the District of Columbia to improve the academic achievement of many

students. These ideas serve as an alternative to the unwise proposal to provide vouchers.

There are many worthwhile ideas for reform that deserve broad support in Congress. I have listened to the debate, and people are just throwing up their hands and saying, ''We have problems in these schools. Let's just try vouchers,'' rather than being serious and looking at what is being attempted in many of these schools and what results they are achieving, evaluating where this additional money could go to benefit the most children. That is the test, I would think, that this voucher amendment fails.

So we know what works, Mr. President, in school reform. We know what teachers need to do to do their jobs well. We need higher standards, better trained teachers, up-to-date classrooms, safe facilities. These are commonsense, doable solutions, and we ought to be doing much more to implement them.

For example, Milwaukee taxpayers have spent $7 million on the voucher program. The program shows no academic gains for the 1,600 students involved. But for that same amount they could have put what they call a Success For All Program in place, which has a solid track record of helping poor children learn more. And it would have benefited every elementary school in that city.

Instead of spending $7 million in the District of Columbia on a private school subsidy that has no proven track record of improving academic achievement and could help at most 2,000 children, we should investigate the strategies that work for all children. The conclusion is obvious. We should choose the 100-percent solution, not the 3-percent solution.

Some D.C. schools have already restructured their facilities, improved teacher training, extended the school day, and enhanced family-centered learning. And they are getting results. We should make sure that every school and community has the resources to put into practice what works, so that no child is left out or left behind.

There are serious problems in the Nation's public schools—especially in urban areas. We can do much more to turn troubled schools around, and undertake a wide range of proven reforms to create and sustain safe and high-performing schools. There are no panaceas to improve schools and improve student learning. There is no blank check. That is why we need to use our limited resources wisely, to get the most benefit for our tax dollars.

Improving student performance starts with a focus on the basics—safety, discipline, high standards, and parent involvement. Sustained improvement must be based on what works, and what is supported by parents, educators, and the larger community. Research shows that student achievement can best be improved by supporting a comprehensive set of district-level and school-level reforms. General Becton's plan supports these reforms, and we should too.

I refer up here to restructuring the whole school. Let me just develop that.

Greater school autonomy, when coupled with performance accountability, can contribute to conditions that make better learning possible. School leaders and teachers can exercise greater control over their school and have a greater sense of personal responsibility for its success. If teachers are to act as professionals and not as robots, they need to be given responsibility for making professional decisions regarding classroom practice and school policy. Holding students to higher standards requires that adults accept higher responsibility for improving student performance.

The Walker Jones Elementary School in northwest Washington is working with the Laboratory for Student Success using Community for Learning, a research-based reform model—and it's working. The concept is called whole school reform. With increased and more intensive teacher training in proven methods and materials geared toward better student learning, student test scores have improved. After 6 months in the program, the school raised its ranking in the District on reading scores from 99th in 1996, to 36th in 1997. In math, the school climbed from 81st in the District to 18th—dramatic, significant academic achievement and performance.

Another result of this reform will be increased accountability throughout the D.C. school system, with better performance measures and clear incentives and consequences for administrators, teachers, and students. Evaluations of teachers and principals will be tied to achievement, and schools that fail to demonstrate improvement will be put on probation.

The principles of Success for All have now been introduced into 475 schools in 31 States. Evaluations show that students in this program tend to perform about 3 months ahead of control students by the end of first grade and by more than a year ahead by the end of fifth grade.

What we are finding out in 475 schools across the country is that the impact that this approach is having in improving academic performance is not just on one or two children in a class, but on all the children. This is the kind of thing we should give attention to and give support to.

A second basic principle of school reform involves organizing schools around a clearer focus on educational excellence for all students, and an academic orientation that challenges all students to master basic and advanced skills in reading, math, and other core subjects.

The voucher program flunks this test. Five years of evaluations by Prof. John F. Witte of the University of Wisconsin-Madison show no achievement difference between voucher students and comparable Milwaukee public school students.

By contrast, in the D.C. public schools, under a new promotion policy beginning this school year, students in grades three and eight must have at least basic reading skills before advancing to a higher grade. This requirement reflects a new commitment by the District to ensure that all children master their basic studies. The District has mandated a 90 minute literacy period for direct instruction each day and suggested additional silent reading times each day. That is giving emphasis, giving priority in local schools to the area that is basic to learning any other possible subject matter, and that is reading. With all respect to computer—reading.

In addition to mastering basic skills, children need to be challenged with a rigorous curriculum. One of the most effective choices that parents and students can make is to choose to take more challenging academic courses.

It works. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that public school reform efforts that include high standards and rigorous courses can improve achievement for the majority of students in the public schools. States and local communities that have set more challenging standards are seeing substantial gains in student achievement.

New York City's College preparatory initiative, mandating more rigorous science and mathematics courses, has resulted in the best-prepared class to enter the City University of New York since 1970. Elementary schools in the city are showing a 4-year rise in test scores. The number of Hispanic and black students who pass the science test more than doubled between 1993 and 1994. There are the result. The whole class is moving up. The whole entry class for the City College of New York is moving up in academic achievement, based on this particular New York College preparatory initiative.

A great deal of attention has been paid this fall to the problem of roof repairs in the D.C. public schools. Far less attention has been paid to the fact that beginning this fall all public schools in the District will have new content and higher performance standards to define what every child in expected to learn and do. D.C. public schools are committed to helping all children meet these standards.

The second point is foster world-class instruction. In addition, in order for students' performance to improve, teachers must be able to teach to higher standards. They must know the content of the curriculum and the best teaching methods for helping students to learn in genuinely challenging courses.

Teachers today, however, are not getting the training they need. One of the best programs we have, the Eisenhower Math-Science Training Program—a hands-on program to upgrade the skills of teachers in our high schools—has

just been block granted under the Gorton amendment, just been wiped off the books. We don't know what they are going to do with that money when it is distributed all over the country, but we know what a difference that funding makes to every one of those math and science teachers in every one of those communities that have benefited from this valuable teacher training program.

Math and science students in inner-city schools have only a 50-percent chance of being taught by a teacher qualified to teach these subjects.

Seven years ago, 53 percent of D.C. teachers were not certified. By last year, the number had dropped to 33 percent. In 1997, all new teachers are certified, and existing teachers must be certified by January 1998 or risk dismissal.

Extending the school day can also be effective. In addition to helping in education, it can also help to create safe havens for students in unsafe neighborhoods.

A recent report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention shows that while violent youth crime is rising rapidly, children are safer in schools than anywhere else. To create a safer, more disciplined, and drug-free environment for children, we need to place more emphasis on hours spent outside school. After school programs that keep children off the street are a powerful and constructive answer to the serious problems of delinquency that plague so many communities. I would say even with regard to unwanted teenage pregnancies, the Centers for Disease Control's study shows that about 65 or 70 percent of these incidents take place in the after-school hours.

This step can work effectively even in individual schools. At the Spingarn School in northeast Washington, the principal made student safety the first priority. Mr. President, 740 students attend the after-school day program and 500 students attend the night program. The school was a safe haven for students.

Drug and violence prevention programs also keep students focused on learning. Students who break school rules are not dumped on the street where they are likely to become perpetrators or victims of violence. Instead, they are placed in separate programs in the school where their education is not interrupted.

We also know that the more time children spend learning, the more they will learn. Programs that extend the school day or the school week can enhance academic achievement. The District of Columbia has created so-called Saturday academies for students who read below grade level. The Saturday curriculum reinforces the weekday instruction, and benefits from a reduced student-teacher ratio.

I can remember when those Saturday programs were first suggested and the uniform impression was: Why bother with it? People won't show up. Parents won't bother. They would rather take the children, if they are not working, to do something else.

That is just hogwash. When those classrooms opened, on Saturday especially, parents made sure their children took advantage of it. And that has been the case overwhelmingly.

In the programs that developed with the Saturday curriculum, we have seen a much better student-teacher ratio and we have seen extremely important progress made.

Schools in Massachusetts are benefiting from these ideas. The Timilty Middle School in Roxbury, MA was long known for its low test scores and high rates for suspending students. Project Promise was established, including an extended school day program to increase the amount of time that students spend in class. School attendance rose, math and reading skills improved, and suspension rates dropped significantly. As a result, the Timilty Middle School was recently cited as an exemplary school by the U.S. Department of Education. It was a dramatic change in the turning around of that school.

Finally, school reform must include greater family involvement. Thirty years of research shows that family involvement in children's learning is a critical link in achieving a high quality education and safe, disciplined learning for every student. Schools can reach out to parents and community members. Together they can develop a shared commitment to excellence for all students, and work in partnership to reach their goals. Family-centered services can be provided that include literacy training for parents, and teaching parents how to help their children with their homework. When teachers and parents work closely together, children can learn more effectively.

The Nalle School in the District of Columbia and the Freddie Mack Foundation are working together to create the District's first full service community school to address the wide range of family needs. Working with service organizations, parents and educators, and community leaders, the school is becoming a major hub of community activity, bringing the parents in, finding out what needs the parents have, and providing them with the instruments to help and assist the children move to higher academic achievement and accomplishment. And it is working. It is working if schools and communities have the resources.

Can we have a chance to go through each of these different proposals at greater length at another time?

I know others want to speak to this, and we have limited time this afternoon, but we will have a chance to go through this in greater detail, I am sure, at some time, Mr. President.

If schools and communities have the resources to choose effective ways, such as these, to ensure all children have an opportunity to reach higher academic standards, schools will be able to offer real alternatives to students and parents while maintaining the kind of accountability that is fundamental to ensure a good education.

Congress can be part of these efforts, too. Instead of debating divisive ideological schemes like vouchers, that undermine the public schools and ignore 97 percent of the children, we can invest in what works and make school reform work for 100 percent of the children in the District of Columbia and in every community.

Good education begins with decent places to learn. Yet, too many of our public schools across the Nation are falling apart, and that is wrong.

I have a chart that reflects exactly what the situation is for the District of Columbia. D.C. schools have more hazardous conditions than the national average. This chart shows that District of Columbia schools' exterior walls and windows fail to meet the minimum standards in terms of safety and quality.

Roof conditions are also much worse than the national average, although this number has improved somewhat because of the action that has taken place in the past 2 to 3 weeks.

Heating and ventilation systems in D.C. schools have twice the problems that we have for the national average.

Plumbing, twice the problems.

Electric lighting, twice the problems that they have.

Life-safety codes, two and a half, three times the problems that they have.

Power for technology, again, well behind the curve, Mr. President.

So these problems are severe in the District schools. Sixty-seven percent of the public schools have crumbling roofs—although as I mentioned, there has been some change in the recent weeks—but only 27 percent of the schools across the country suffer from the problem.

I daresay, if you want to look at the national standards, they are not all that great. In Boston, there are a number of schools in the wintertime, anywhere from 15 to 18 schools, that do not open because of various heating problems every day.

The situation in Boston has improved somewhat under Mayor Menino and Tom Payzant. But go to the older towns of New Bedford, Fall River, Lowell, Lawrence, Holyoke, Springfield, North Adams, and many of the other smaller communities also on the north shore, and you find problems similar to those of the D.C. schools.

So the national average is not a very positive test. Senator MOSELEY-BRAUN has been the leader in the U.S. Senate in recognizing that unless facilities are suitable for learning purposes, we disadvantage children to such an extraordinary degree. Not just because there are no textbooks available or because it is colder in the wintertime, but the point that she has made, and I think so powerfully and effectively, is what it does to a child who goes into a classroom that is in such a state of deterioration. We say education is important.

People in the communities say education is important. The children every single day go into these dilapidated conditions where they are not able to get the school books they need, where the roofs are leaking, windows won't close, where they don't have adequate heating, where they don't have the electrical outlets for computers. Mr. President, what kind of message is it sending to those children when we are out there putting increasing demands on those children? That is something for which I think we as a society pay a very heavy price. But that is another issue for another time.

The point is, we tried to mention the places the $7 million could be used that would enhance the academic achievement and accomplishments of a great number of the students.

The school facilities, as I mentioned, across the country are in poor condition. It is a national problem. Water damage from an old boiler has caused so much wall deterioration in one D.C. junior high school that the entire wing has been condemned. Leaking roofs have been causing ceilings to crumble on teachers' and students' desks. Fire doors are warped shut. Some schools are sweltering in hot weather because they lack air-conditioning. Others are so poorly insulated that students must wear coats indoors in the winter.

According to D.C. public schools, $87 million was needed to make the critical repairs necessary to ensure all schools would be ready to open for the 1997–98 period. Yet, only $50 million was appropriated to repair the schools. Requests for additional funding were initially denied by Congress and only made available at the last minute. So Congress deserves part of the responsibility for the crisis that was caused by the recent 3-week delay in the opening of the schools.

Isn't that wonderful? Here we are trying to tell the District of Columbia what they ought to do with scarce resources, and we were late in putting the money up so they could open in the first place, disadvantaging all of those children. Mr. President, we do not have a good enough record to dictate to the District of Columbia on education or on most other items.

D.C. schools need much more repair. Any funding that we invest should be spent on improving the public schools for students. We should not be diverting the Federal dollars to pay subsidies for the private schools when public schools have such pressing, urgent needs. It is preposterous to pretend that we can prepare for the 21st century in dilapidated 19th century classrooms.

Improving educational opportunities for all children deserves the highest priority at every level of Government and in every community across the Nation. Educating our youth is one of our Nation's most important responsibilities. If we fail to make sound investments in education, few other investments will make much difference for our country and its role in the world in the years ahead.

In meeting the educational needs of children, we must allocate scarce resources wisely. We know what works. We must make sure that every child has access to it. We should not give public funds to schools that can exclude children. We should invest in public schools so that all children have the opportunity for a good education. We should rebuild communities, not divide them. Communities across the country are working hard to improve their public schools, and Congress should help them to do more as well, not make their current troubles worse. We should create improved conditions in all schools for all children, and we should start with safe buildings, decent roofs, good plumbing, and classrooms equipped for the 21st century of learning.

Mr. President, what could we do with the $7 million? We can improve the infrastructure with that $7 million. It could buy 368 new boilers for D.C. schools. There are 157 schools, and at least with regard to trying to make sure that they have hot water and heating systems, we could do much for the D.C. schools.

We could rewire 65 schools that don't have the capacity to accommodate computers and multimedia equipment. We have in the budget about $300 million a year for new technology, technology grants to try to help assist local communities with new computers. Why don't we go ahead and wire some of the schools so at least they will be able to participate in these new kinds of technologies? Why don't we train the teachers to be able to use those technologies in a way that can integrate computers into the curriculum and give these children an opportunity so that they are going to be able to compete in the future? We could rewire 65 schools.

We could upgrade the plumbing in 102 schools with substandard facilities. We see the problem here, the challenge. We have double the problems in just basic fundamental plumbing in the schools. We could upgrade the plumbing in over 100 of those schools so that we can make some difference, again in terms of infrastructure. That $7 million can do a lot for infrastructure.

What could $7 million do to support other programs that are demonstrating enhanced academic achievement? The few that I mentioned—and at another opportunity, I will go into more detail on some others—$1 million would buy 66,000 new hard-cover books for the D.C. school libraries. That is very important. If you look at what is available in those D.C. libraries and compare them to libraries in schools all over the country, you will find them dramatically shortchanged. We have a real opportunity to make a difference in the libraries of schools all over the District, and we could have an important impact in making sure that each student is going to have the textbooks which they require in the classroom. They don't have those today.

Here we are talking about spending $7 million to give vouchers to 2,000 students when the other students who are left back in the classroom don't even have the textbooks to be able to follow what is going on in the classroom. Maybe we will hear other testimony, I am sure we will, about the miracles of vouchers in improving academic achievement for students, but I haven't heard any convincing arguments made in the course of this debate. To the contrary; we can take additional time and demonstrate where the various reviews have failed.

Mr. President, $1 million would fully fund after-school programs in 25 schools; $7 million would fund after-school programs in every one of the District of Columbia schools and benefit every child—every child—not just 3 percent; every child.

In any fair evaluation about what is happening in these after-school programs, we must note what a difference these programs have meant, when we tie them in to academic help and assistance, in advancing students' academic achievements and accomplishments and in improving interest in school and attendance rates. The programs are reducing absenteeism and keeping children safe and secure and beginning to challenge and open up new opportunities of learning for children. You would be able to do this with the $7 million for every school in the District of Columbia. But, no, we are going to take 3 percent of those children and give them a voucher with which they may or may not be able to get into some school, not which their parents are going to be able to get them into, or not that the child is going to be able to get into, but the school is going to make that judgment and decision.

Mr. President, $3.5 million would link 58 more schools to research, improving designs and improving day-to-day instructions. Those are the other kinds of programs that I referred to earlier in my comments.

I certainly hope that this amendment will not be accepted. We too often around here look for easy answers to tough, complicated problems. Recently, if we find out we have a problem, more often than not we propose a constitutional amendment to deal with it. We have more constitutional amendments pending in the Judiciary Committee in this Congress than in the history of the country. We have gotten to where we think if we just pass a constitutional amendment, all of these problems are going to be resolved.

We are not going to be able to deal with all of the problems that all of us understand are out there in the public school system on the cheap. It is going to be tough, difficult work. Money in and of itself is not the only answer. In many instances, you can probably get a much better and higher grade education with the amount of resources

that are being expended. We understand that. We know that. But, nonetheless, what we are talking about here with this particular amendment is a reflection of our priorities—of our priorities.

How are we going to spend that $7 million? Are we going to prioritize 3 percent of those children with a program that I believe is unconstitutional? And perhaps those that defend it are going to be able to make a case to respond to what is happening up in Wisconsin and what has happened in Vermont and other States that have struck down vouchers over the last year—maybe they will be able to sustain it. Perhaps they will be able to make the case with those 3 percent of children going to these private schools, that they are demonstrating what a breakthrough kind of academic brilliance that they are able to achieve and accomplish, and we are going to find the whole country is going to be shaken by this experience and we are going to do something dramatic about it.

The fact is, Mr. President, those that have demonstrated over the course of their lives—some with more success than others—know that this is hard, tough work, that it is a combination of elements.

Children are not going to learn if there is disruption in those classrooms, if the classrooms are not safe. Children are not going to learn if they go to school hungry during the course of the day. Children are not going to learn if they do not have the textbooks. Children are not going to learn if they have an inadequately trained teacher. Children are not going to learn if they know that their walls are crumbling down and they do not have light.

Just like the children are not going to learn if they have hearing problems or if they have vision problems or if they have some asthmatic problems—they are sick.

One of the benefits that we have taken care of, hopefully, in the recent action here, is to try and make sure that children are going to get the preventative health care so that when they go in there at least they are going to be healthy children when they go to those classrooms.

We know some of the things that inhibit children from learning. We do not know all the things that enhance their academic achievement, but we know some. And we know some of the ones that have a proven record, demonstrable record, with solid results.

The question that the Senate is going to have to ask is, are we going to try this kind of a program here for $7 million when we can invest that $7 million in some of the programs here in the District, replicating the ones here in the districts that the parents want, that the teachers know have been successful, that have been carefully evaluated, that will benefit the greatest number of children? Or are we going to reach down from Olympus and say, ''OK, we here in the Senate are deciding for you, even though you don't want it. We're going to experiment here. We can't pass this kind of legislation back in our own States where it's been defeated at times that it has gone before the electorate, but we're going to try it on you here. We have $7 million. And in spite of the fact that your religious leaders, your business leaders, your elected leaders do not want that, and want it invested in these other programs, that's too bad. That's too bad on this. We're just going to say, 'You're going to have to have it because we want to experiment with it.' We want to try and find some silver bullet to solve this problem''?

I hope, Mr. President, that this amendment is not accepted.

Mr. President, how much time is left?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts controls 14 minutes, the Senator from Indiana 57 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I very much want to respond—and so does Senator LIEBERMAN—to some of Senator KENNEDY's remarks. But our colleague, Senator CRAIG, has been very patiently waiting. I yield to him up to 7 minutes or as much time as he consumes short of that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized for 7 minutes.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, let me, first of all, thank my colleague from Indiana for yielding.

I have been sitting here for the last 35 or 40 minutes listening to what is a truly sincere statement by the Senator from Massachusetts as it relates to the state and the condition of the D.C. school system.

He has left up a chart that recognizes seven categories of dilapidation that have resulted in the D.C. schools not opening on time this year. If you were to look at that chart, and all of the statistics of the D.C. school system separate from the rest of the country, you would say, ''My goodness, what happened? Why didn't we give them the money to fix the doors, the windows, the electrical, the plumbing, the physical structures of the school system? What happened?''

Mr. President, they had the money. They were given the money. I do not know what happened other than to say, they blew the money, they failed. By every measurement, the D.C. public school system is at the bottom. And that is a tragedy.

You can defend the status quo and argue you have to pour more money in. But even the Senator from Massachusetts agrees, it isn't necessarily a money issue.

Well, then for goodness sakes, what is it? Is it a new program, a special program, a great idea, an infusion of a new concept that will turn this public school system around?

Many examples have been cited in one school system or another across this country by the Senator from Massachusetts over the last 40 minutes; and yet he condemns a program or an idea that is embodied in this amendment. It tries to do something very important to a failed system—inject it with a competitive idea that forces a new thinking that must be allowed to happen.

I must tell you, if the schools of Idaho had the kind of money that the schools of the District of Columbia have, because we provide—and I do not say this with any pride—nearly $2,500 less per student than the District schools get here, and if we had the measurement of the standards and the failures of this school system, the Idaho system would have been changed dramatically years ago. You have heard the comparisons I am referencing.

Last year, 72 percent of D.C.'s eighth graders in public school scored below the basic proficiencies in math, and 29 percent failed to meet basic proficiencies in reading; and yet they got $2,500 more per student than the Idaho students, and our scores are among the top in the country.

I do not mean to be pounding my chest about Idaho schools. I want to see our educators get more money and I want to see more money put into Idaho schools. But it is fair and it is important that we compare a failed system with a performing system and the dollars and cents involved, and to argue, as we must, that it is not a money issue. And it isn't. And we know that.

And this voucher amendment isn't to do with money. It is to do with the ability of parents to be able to decide what is best for their children and to have the flexibility to move on that decision.

Why has education, Mr. President, been nearly every person in this country's No. 1 choice in the public polling of our country over the last decade when asked, ''What's the most important issue on your mind?'' Not because it is so good—we are oftentimes reminded of quite the opposite. It is because the public school systems of our country are in trouble. Parents are concerned about the quality of education our children get, their children get and their futures.

When you can't guarantee safety—and the District schools can't; when you can't guarantee discipline—and the District schools can't; when you can't guarantee high standards—and the District schools can't; you fail. If there were an opportunity for the children of the District to go somewhere else, there would be one of the greatest educational exoduses in the history of this country. That is not going to happen.

But what this voucher amendment offers is some reasonable understanding that we ought to try to make a difference. It isn't some grand experiment, not at all. It is, without question, an idea whose time has come, an

idea to inject a competitive environment into a monopolistic system that at the very best creates the lowest common denominator. That is not good enough for the young people of this District, and it is not good enough for any young person anywhere in this country.

The good side about the District schools not opening happened in my office over the last 3 weeks. A young lady who is a junior at Eastern High School here in the District came to intern in my office, Kimberly, a delightful young lady. We learned a lot from her; and I think she learned a lot from us.

But she did say this to me as she left to go back to school. ''Senator Craig, I think I've learned more here in 3 weeks than I'll learn in a full semester in my school.'' She was being kind, but the problem is, I look at the statistics of the school she attends and she's right, she's accurate. This young lady deserves every opportunity possible that the public school system should offer her and yet it does not.

She said, ''Can I come back to your office? Can I be a part of your office, because I know that I can learn a great deal? And I'll do extra time so I can do that.'' And we are going to see if we can make that happen.

School choice—that is what we are talking about today—transfers power over basic education away from the bureaucrat and to the parent. I suggest that the failures of the District system are a clear reflection of the bureaucrats having had that opportunity.

Nobody dare defend a school system where 40 percent of ninth graders drop out or leave before graduation or where only 50 percent of education expenditures go toward instruction, compared to 62 percent nationally.

Mr. President, we wouldn't tolerate failures such as this in my State, and we shouldn't except them in the Nation's capital.

Allowing for school choice is a viable solution to the woes of the District's schools. This amendment is a reasonable and appropriate answer to this crisis. This measure would provide scholarships to over 2,000 public school students, the poorest of the city's poor. These scholarships could be spent to attend any private or public school in the District or the neighboring counties of Maryland and Virginia. Most importantly, scholarships would be targeted to the poorest students, those living below or near the poverty line.

Opponents of the measure make one argument: school choice diverts money away from public schools for the benefit of a few students. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

This measure would not cost the public school system anything—not $1 would leave the public school system. The funding is entirely new money—taken from an increase in the Federal Government's contribution to the city's debt.

Mr. President, today the Senate is being asked to make a choice between the status quo and real reform. I thank Senator COATS, Senator LIEBERMAN, Senator BROWNBACK, Senator LANDRIEU for offering us this opportunity to debate school choice.

This is not a partisan issue. This is all about kids and a failing system and the responsibility of this country and its policymakers to make the difference, because it is a public educational school system. We are not going to worry about the private system. It competes. It has to be good or it will not get the kids.

But the public school system does not have to be good because the kids that cannot afford to get out of it have to go to it. We should not sit here and pound our chests and talk about all the good things because we need to correct the bad things. And that way a very important public education system will be better. It is good in a lot of places around the country. It is bad here in the District of Columbia, and we ought not hold anybody prisoner to that idea.

Let's give parents and students a fighting chance—let's give them a choice and a future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. COATS. I yield such time as she may consume to the Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized,

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Thank you, Mr. President.

I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. I will be brief because I know a number of people have opinions on this subject. But, Mr. President, I think we are talking about the future of public education. I have heard people say, why not just improve public education? That is what we are trying to do. That is the bottom line of what this amendment is trying to do—introduce some new idea, introduce a new way of trying to improve public education by having competition in our system.

Mr. President, what makes America America, what makes America different from other countries in the world has always been our commitment to quality public education so that every child in our country would have the opportunity, with a full range of public education, to fulfill his or her potential.

I am a product of public education. I think it is important that we have the quality so that a person like me can stand on the floor with a person like Senator KENNEDY who has had quality private education. In order to do that, I think it is important that we have new ideas because, as they say in my home State, ''If it ain't broke, don't fix it.''

This is broken. The District of Columbia schools spend more money per student than any school in America, and yet steadily we have seen the decline of the quality of education as judged by the scores on tests.

So more money is clearly not the answer. Maybe some competition, maybe letting the mother of a 10-year-old boy who is going to a school that may or may not be open because of fire codes, that may not be able to educate this child because he is being offered drugs on the school grounds, give that mother a chance to do something different for her child, and that is to give her child a chance with a voucher to go somewhere else for competition. And then perhaps, if this works as a test, it might be something that we can do in low- and moderate-income areas all over our country. Maybe that is a new idea that might work.

Mr. President, this is an amendment that is a field test for another way to try to improve our public education system, which I think everyone in the U.S. Senate wants to do. But why are we not open to a new idea? Why wouldn't we say if any place deserves a try, it is this community, the District of Columbia, where we see the test scores go down in relation to the Federal money that has gone in. Let's try something new. This is the perfect place to do it.

I commend the Senator from Indiana, the Senator from Connecticut, and all those who are cosponsoring this innovative idea so we can have a test market to give every child a chance to have a great public education by introducing a choice. With that competition, encouraging every public school to come up in standards to attract those vouchers that would provide that quality public education that we have guaranteed to our people for the last 221 years in this country, and which if we are going to remain the greatest country on Earth, must be the hallmark of our freedom—a quality public education.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I will just take one moment to ask Senator HUTCHISON—I understand this issue about vouchers was actually considered by the Texas legislature this year and was actually rejected. That is part of the problem that many of us have.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I say perhaps, for once, maybe Washington could teach us a lesson.

Mr. KENNEDY. Touche.

I mention to my friend from Idaho before he leaves, we acknowledge the previous failure that he had outlined here very eloquently this afternoon when we established the control board. The D.C. school chief executive officer, General Becton, has had 10 months to enact changes. In that short time, they have consolidated and closed 12 school buildings, hired only certified teachers, established annual testing for all students, and set standards for teachers and principals.

They have only been in effect for 10 months and here we already are changing and interfering with their priority. I think for the reasons that the Senator has pointed out—there has been this dramatic change in terms of the leadership, those that are trying to

provide new leadership, and here we are in the Congress trying to second-guess.

Mr. CRAIG. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield.

Mr. CRAIG. I appreciate what the Senator from Massachusetts said. I think all of us are extremely excited about what we hope will happen here in the District. And, of course, you and I have both used the figures that demonstrate the failure of this system.

What I think we offer today is an enhancement and an accelerated opportunity to assist in what is underway. I appreciate what the Senator is saying.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield the remaining time to the Senator from Illinois.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GORTON). The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN. Mr. President, I want to commend the Senator from Massachusetts for his leadership, for his consistency, and for his outstanding advocacy on behalf of children in this country. I think it is fair to say, and everyone who hears my voice will recognize, there is no one that TED KENNEDY takes second place to when it comes to fighting for children. He has been a leader and continues to be.

I am so pleased to have this opportunity to join him in strong opposition to this voucher proposal. Let me touch for a moment on what I see as the central flaw with this voucher proposal—whether it is for the District of Columbia or any other school system. Voucher programs for elementary and secondary education presume that a market-based solution will solve problems that exist within our public education system.

We have heard a lot about competition in the system. That suggests that there will be a meeting in the marketplace and that quality will rise out of that competition, out of that meeting of forces in the marketplace. I point out to anyone listening, if you think about it for a moment, markets by definition have winners and losers. The question then becomes whether or not we can afford to impose a market-based solution where the welfare of all of our children is involved. We cannot afford in this country any losers in a game of educational roulette, or, as much to the point, in an approach to what for all intents and purposes is an educational triage in which only those youngsters who have the family structure, who have the ability, can retreat from the public school system, leaving whatever else is behind.

It is very interesting, by the way, that a lot of the discussion goes to providing poor children with options. The fact of the matter is that public education in this country excelled precisely because it wasn't just about poor children. It was about providing quality education to any child of whatever wealth, from whatever communities, whether their parents were engaged with their education or whether their parents were found lying in a gutter somewhere. A child who had more talents than means could access quality education because our system supported quality public education.

Education is about more than an individual's ability to get trained for a good job, although certainly that is one of the benefits of it. We are very clear, without education individuals are handicapped when it comes to the job market.

The point has to be made, and made over and over again, that it is more than about just individuals. Education is a public good as well. It is a private benefit, to be sure, but it is also a public good. It is something that affects our entire community. It affects the quality of life in our community. It affects everything from health status to voter behavior, to whether or not individuals, or whether or not communities, will support our democracy and appreciate the higher values of our community.

Quality public education has shaped our democracy. It created a strong middle class. It propelled our country to the top of the world's economic pyramid. The rungs of the ladder of opportunity in our country have historically been crafted in the classroom. I think our generation has an obligation to see to it that the legacy of quality public education is not abandoned and, as much to the point, is not diluted by efforts, such as this one, to divert resources and divert support away from the public education system.

The reason that we have compulsory education in this country is not so that every child can access the best education that his or her parents can afford or find, but so that every child can receive a quality education. If our public schools are not meeting that challenge, then it is our responsibility to fix those schools. A federally funded voucher program would not fix a single public school. In fact, if anything, this effort represents a retreat from the challenge of making our schools work for every child, making our schools rise to the level of excellence that as a community we have every right to expect.

Vouchers represent putting individuals over the interests of the whole community. Vouchers necessarily will benefit only a small percentage, a small number of students. Consider for a moment there are roughly 46 million public school students and 6 million private school students. Any large-scale voucher program would obviously overwhelm the private schools. Advocates claim that entrepreneurs would start up high-quality schools to meet the demand. Just look at the potential for abuse and ask yourself the question, what do we do when we look up and discover a whole slew of less-than-quality school facilities in which people's only objective is to make money? There is no reason to think that by providing this spinoff of resources from public education that we would wind up with a system that was any better.

Supporters of the voucher proposals claim they would help the neediest children the most. I submit that both research, experience, and common sense suggest otherwise. Researchers have concluded that academically and socially disadvantaged students are less likely to benefit from school voucher programs. It is amazing to me that the academic research on this subject has not gotten more attention. Voucher programs in other countries where they have had such programs confirm this research, that, indeed, the voucher approach, spinning off from the public school system, has led to economic as well as social segregation of students. Instead of narrowing the gap between wealthy and poor, instead of narrowing the gap between communities of students, the voucher proposals when implemented had the effect of widening the gap. I don't think we want in our time to be responsible for widening the inequalities among students. If anything, we should be endeavoring to narrow that.

As a matter of fact, in one study that took place in Chile, performance actually declined for low-income students. That is not surprising because any use of public funds for private schools requires that fewer resources be devoted to the public schools. Since the vast majority of low-income students will remain in the public schools and the worst of the schools are, for the most part, already sorely underfunded, it is just evident that private school vouchers would further weaken public education.

Right now, the Federal Government—it is ironic that we are having this debate—the Federal Government right now currently only meets about 6 percent of the costs of elementary and secondary public education in this country. We don't even provide the funding—and I know the Presiding Officer will recognize this issue—we don't even cover the costs of unfunded mandates in education. To further divert resources from what we are already not doing makes absolutely no sense at all.

Transferring funds from public schools to private schools will not buy new textbooks for public school students or encourage better teachers to move to the public schools nor fix a single leaking roof on a public school. All it does is divert resources, precious resources to begin with, away from the system that is already underfunded and that needs it the most.

Supporters of private school vouchers claim that those schools are better managed, they perform better, and cost less than public schools. Again, the facts suggest otherwise.

It is absolutely true that some public schools are inefficient. Again, vouchers don't solve those inefficiencies. What solves those problems are good managers. In Chicago, in my hometown of Chicago, IL, innovative leadership and a ''no excuses'' attitude totally reshaped the system there in the space of about 2 years. Under the leadership that is now in place, our school system is improving itself to the benefit of all

of the 425,000 students in that system, not just the select few who might have been spun off with a voucher plan.

Every school system calls upon the people, the leadership of that community, to focus in on management issues, to address the longstanding issues of neglect and of finance that have hamstrung our ability to provide quality public education to all children.

The evidence also disproves the claims that vouchers improve student achievement. Annual evaluations of the program in the city of Milwaukee concluded that vouchers have not done so. Again, I call my colleagues' attention to all of the research that has been done in this area. There is no scientific evidence to support the notion that somehow by taking away from public education you improve it.

As for cost, again, the private schools can cost less in some instances because only 17 percent of them provide special education, which, of course, is a high ticket item. It costs twice as much to educate disabled children. Again, the point ought to be made that the public schools take everyone. They are schools in which all consistencies, all kinds of students, whether they are rich, disabled, poor or whether their parents have problems, or whether they are troubled, all students come. With compulsory education they have to. By setting up a system that spins off a part of the student body, all we are doing, again, is creating a situation in which those who are the most able and the most capable and have the most family support will leave the school system and leave behind those who are least capable of doing well for themselves.

Here in the District of Columbia—and, again, this is once again the District of Columbia being made into a guinea pig, for all intents and purposes, for ideas that are floating around without addressing the real challenges of the District of Columbia—I, too, had interns in my office, students from the District of Columbia, who interned in my office precisely because the schools were closed here.

Why were they closed? Because the court had decreed that the school environment, the facilities were crumbling so badly that it was unsafe and hazardous for children to go to school there. It would be more appropriate for us to devote the money being proposed to be taken out here to rebuilding the crumbling schools in the District of Columbia, to making sure the roofs don't leak and the windows aren't broken and the electrical systems work, to fix the schools that we have, to meet the challenge of supporting public education instead of coming up with yet another excuse not to support the schools we have in place already.

This approach, in my opinion, represents, in the final analysis, a retreat, a pessimistic capitulation to a winnable challenge. We can fix these schools. We can do at least as much as the previous generation did, our parents. The generation before us left us a legacy of a system of quality public education in which every child, no matter what the circumstances, can get an education consistent with their talent without regard to their means. We have an obligation to do no less for the next generation of Americans. Coming up with an approach that will spend away resources from our system of public education does not keep faith with that legacy of support for quality public education as an integral and central part of the American dream.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Arkansas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, I rise in the strongest support of the District of Columbia student opportunity scholarship amendment offered by Senators COATS and LIEBERMAN to the D.C. appropriations bill. I have long been convinced of the value of school choice programs. I think the debate this afternoon has been very healthy for our country.

Earlier this year, the Washington Post ran a five-part series on the D.C. schools, detailing the mounting problems of the physical deterioration of its school buildings, violence in the classrooms, and the falling academic success among students. Eighty-five percent of D.C. public school students who go on to college at the University of the District of Columbia [UDC] need 2 years of remedial education before beginning course work toward a degree at all. While this statistic is alarming and should not be tolerated, it is a prime example of how the D.C. public schools are failing the very children that they are supposed to be serving. It is the children who are the losers.

Some argue, as my colleague just argued, that if only more money were available to mend the crumbling school buildings, or to better train the teachers or to hire more teachers, then everything would be fine. Mr. President, more money is not really the answer. Despite spending more than $7,300 per student in 1996, which is among the Nation's highest spending rates, 65 percent of all D.C. public schoolchildren, two-thirds of them, test below their grade levels; 72 percent of fourth graders in the D.C. public schools tested below basic proficiency on the NAEP test—worse than any other school system in the Nation.

More money is not the answer. What about the increased violence? The National Education Goals Panel reported last year that both students and teachers in D.C. schools are subjected to levels of violence that are twice the national average.

So I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, isn't this bill the perfect place to give us the opportunity to show what vouchers can do? They do help real families. Some of my staff members are privileged to work with one D.C. family who was fortunate to have received $4,000 of scholarship money this fall to enroll six of their children in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic School here in the District of Columbia. I had the honor of meeting one of those children, Shannon, when she visited my office in the spring to interview me as part of a school project on Arkansas. It was little Shannon who, 1 year ago, told her tutor that she wanted to go to a Catholic school. When asked why, she emphatically answered, ''because I want to learn much.''

Mr. President, even though Shannon had never been to a Catholic school, nor did she know anybody enrolled in a Catholic school, she knew that if she went to a Catholic school, she would learn. She wanted to learn much. Shannon's mother knew that, for her children to progress in their studies and graduate from high school, she desperately needed to get them out of the failing D.C. schools and into a place where the teachers would spend time with her children and teach them.

Under this amendment, nearly 2,000 of the District of Columbia's poorest children—not the wealthy kids, those from the rich side of town whose parents can afford to send them to elite schools—but the poorest children would receive scholarships for tuition costs at a private school in the District of Columbia, or in adjacent counties in Maryland and Virginia. Mothers like Shannon's are eyewitnesses to their children's improvement when their children are enrolled in a safe, stable, and thriving school environment.

The Coats-Lieberman plan is a lifeline of hope for thousands of D.C. parents, like Shannon's mom, who have waited and are still waiting for an opportunity to give their children a solid education and a chance to succeed.

This amendment makes so much common sense. The question is, will vouchers work? Let's give vouchers a chance right here in one of the worst school districts in the Nation. Let's not continue to put good money after bad by simply pouring it into a system that is broken. Let's give the children of this city hope. Let's give the parents of the poorest children in this city an opportunity to give their children the best educational opportunity.

I commend the Senator from Indiana, Senator COATS, and Senator LIEBERMAN for their leadership and for the opportunity to conduct this debate and to cast this important vote.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the patient Senator from Oklahoma, who has been waiting a long time to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I was in the chair when I heard the very eloquent speech, of course, as always, by Senator LIEBERMAN. One thing he said at the very last surprised me a little bit. I think kind of out of desperation he said, ''We are only talking about $7 million. We try a lot of things that cost a lot more than that.''

I am here to inform Senator LIEBERMAN—and I believe he knows it already—that it has been tried. I started with our mutual friend, Tony Coelho, in 1993, who established an organization called the Washington Scholarship Fund. There were many Democrats and Republicans involved. Senator KERREY, at that time, was an honorary chairman, and Bill Bennett was one of the honorary chairmen, also. Directors and advisors included Boyden Gray and Doreen Gentzler, a local Channel 4 TV news anchor.

Our goal was to help needy or low-income families send their children to private school—the very thing we are talking about here. We were trying it through the private sector to see if it would work. What we did was not pay the entire scholarship, as we are talking about here, for a number of students, but to pay half of it. I think the average tuition is around $3,000 a year. Now, what we did was, we would offer a scholarship of $1,500 a year, so that the parents would have to pay half of it, so they would have to have an interest in that. To be eligible, they had to be residents of the District of Columbia. Ours was K through 8, as opposed to K through 12. I think K through 12 is probably better. They must be low-income by Federal standards.

Anyway, we went ahead with this program on the half tuition. We had people lined up in the school year of 1993 and 1994, and we had 57 students. That is about $75,000 that we raised privately for these one-half scholarships. Last year, we were up to 250 students that we helped. That is a substantial increase. But the interesting thing is that we have over 800 now on a waiting list. I am sure that there are probably more out there waiting that are not familiar with the program. But it is overwhelmingly successful. In the schools, they concentrate on strong values, basic reading and writing and math skills, and we have a lot of parental involvement.

A lot of people are not aware that in Washington, DC, there are at least 25 private schools with tuitions less than $2,500 a school year. They average about $3,000. Most of the private schools in the District of Columbia operate way below capacity, or their average tuition probably could come down, they would estimate.

The Washington Scholarship Fund is one of 32 private school scholarship programs nationwide in cities like Milwaukee, Los Angeles, New York, and, in fact, there is one in the home State of Senator COATS, in Indianapolis. They are currently helping approximately 12,000 needy children, and they have 40,000 on a waiting list.

Well, when I heard the Senator from Connecticut say he didn't know exactly how much it was costing the public school system in Washington, DC, I think he is right because the accounting system, as he points out, is very poor. However, I have heard the range to be somewhere between $7,700 and $10,000. So here we are talking about being able to give a better education at approximately one-third of the cost—in other words, for the same cost, reaching three times the number of children.

Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. INHOFE. Not on my time. On your time, I will.

Ms. MOSELEY-BRAUN. There is no time left.

Mr. INHOFE. I am sorry, I have to use my time. The dropout rate is a problem. I will read a couple of things that I think are significant.

One of the mothers, named Voni Eason, said:

> My son loves the school. He even likes the uniform. He feels like he's a grown man. Without an education—and a good, strong education—he's not going to have a job. Without the Washington Scholarship Fund, he wouldn't be able to go to his school.

That is a mother making a testimonial.

Tanya Odemns' son actually tried the public schools system in Washington, DC. She said:

> My son wasn't learning anything. He didn't know his ABCs, didn't know how to spell his name . . . public school didn't give him any homework. I know my son is very intelligent and wants to learn. When I heard about the Washington Scholarship Fund, I just hopped on it real quick. [Now] he's excited when he comes home, wants to do homework.

Mr. President, it has been tried and it is successful. It works.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Under the previous order, at 4:30, the Senate is to proceed to debate on the defense appropriations bill.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I promised the Senator from New York he could get a statement in.

I yield to the Senator from New York.

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time for the Senate to consider the defense appropriations bill be extended for 3 additional minutes.

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

Mr. D'AMATO. I thank the managers of the bill. Mr. President, let me say this. I strongly, strongly support this amendment. I want to commend Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator COATS for fighting to give the families, the parents, the youngsters in the Washington, DC, public school system a chance. Too many are trapped. We are talking about working families who don't have the ability to move to areas with better schools. They don't have the financial wherewithal to send their children to better schools, including private schools, that are safer and may give a stronger educational opportunity. Al Smith, a great Governor from our State, used to say, ''Let's look at the record.'' Well, look at the record. How can we be defending the status quo of an education system in the District of Columbia that has been a failure—a failure. Forty percent of these youngsters never graduate from high school; 40% of D.C. public school students leave the school system between ninth grade and graduation.

In terms of scores, it's incredible: during the 1996–97 school year, 72 percent of the eighth graders score below basic in math—72 percent; 78 percent of the D.C. public school fourth graders rank below basic reading achievement levels in 1994; 80 percent of the D.C. fourth graders in 1996 achieved below the basic math achievement levels.

Do we want to save these youngsters? Or are we so interested in protecting the status of the unions, because that is what this is about. We are talking about the status quo, where you have a system that cares more about tenure for teachers that can't teach, more about seeing that the perks and privileges of the unions are protected—as opposed to providing students and their parents an opportunity to have a choice for real opportunity and to break out of this mediocrity.

The fact is, we once had great and vibrant public educational institutions. That was before the days when the union perks and prerequisites came first.

I support merit pay for good teachers. Let's reward them and get rid of the tenure system that is guaranteed to provide mediocrity and less for students. Let's have renewable tenure.

Parents should be empowered to make choices, letting them have the opportunity to send their kids to the best schools.

Who is trapped in the sea of mediocrity? I will tell you. The poorest of the poor; the working families; the families that can't move to another area to give their kids a good educational opportunity.

I have to tell you something. I look to Congressman FLOYD FLAKE. The Reverend FLAKE is resigning his position. He is elected with 90-some-odd-plus percent when he runs. He truly is the servant of the people. This is not intended to be a testimonial to him. I will give that before October 15 when he retires. But let me tell you about one of the things that the Congressman is going to do. He is going to go back and fight in New York to empower parents and to give children and their parents choice and an educational opportunity that now is all but put aside.

We can make a difference. I don't care if it is 1,000 students that it helps, or 1,500 students. That is 1,500 more youngsters who will get a chance to flourish in an oasis of educational opportunity as opposed to a swamp and a sea of mediocrity that are tearing down educational opportunities for kids.

We have got to try to do something better. And it isn't putting more of this money into a system that is broken down.

Mr. President, I say this is the least we can do. This is an innovative opportunity to take one of the worst school systems in America and to begin to

empower parents on behalf of their children to give them real educational opportunity.

I yield the floor.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report H.R. 2266, the conference report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee on conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the H.R. 2266 having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by majority of the conferees.

The Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 23, 1997.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Members of the staff of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2266: Sid Ashworth, Susan Hogan, Jay Kimmitt, Gary Reese, Mary Marshall, John Young, Mazie Mattson, Michelle Randolph, Charlie Houy, Emelie East, and Mike Morris, a legislative fellow detailed to the committee from the Department of Defense.

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

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, the conference report on H.R. 2269, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1998, closely follows the bill passed by the Senate on July 15.

The bill provides $247.5 billion in new budget authority for the Department, an amount within the levels set in the budget agreement with the White House.

As in July, the conference report reflects a bipartisan effort, and I am grateful to my friend and colleague from Hawaii, Senator INOUYE, for his partnership in bringing this bill back to the Senate, and bringing it back as a very good bill.

The House passed the conference report by a vote of 356 to 65, today.

The full text of the conference report, and the accompanying statement of the managers was printed in yesterday's CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

The print of House Report 105–265 has been available to all Members today.

The tables and descriptive text of the statement of the managers details the funding levels for all the programs considered by the conferees—I will not take the Senate's time to summarize those adjustments.

I do want to highlight the toughest policy issue we faced—continued funding for operations in and around Bosnia.

The House of Representatives in its original bill passed a provision which was a total prohibition on spending for any operations in Bosnia after June 30, 1998.

Personally, I believe we should withdraw our forces from Bosnia.

Secretary Cohen and General Ralston met with us, and urged us not to take that unilateral step, at this time.

Prior to this conference, several of us traveled to the United Kingdom, for the periodic United States-United Kingdom interparliamentary meetings.

In those talks some of us came to appreciate better the total dependence by our European allies on the United States forces in Bosnia.

The compromise we reached retains the position of the House that we bring our forces out of Bosnia by June 30, but the President can waive that requirement if he certifies to the Congress the forces must stay in the interest of our national security.

The President must also inform the Congress on seven points: First, the reasons for the deployment; second, the number of personnel to be deployed; third, the duration of the mission; fourth, the mission and objectives; fifth, the exit strategy for U.S. forces; sixth, the costs for operations past June 30; and seventh, the impact on morale and retention.

This certification to Congress will constitute the first time this President has informed the Congress about Bosnia before deploying or extending our forces there.

I want to recognize the leadership of my good friend from Kansas, Senator PAT ROBERTS, who contributed to our discussions in the United Kingdom following the visit he made to the continent. And it was his ideas that he passed on to me that really led to the compromise that we have reached in this conference.

The Congress and the American people, Senator ROBERTS told me, deserve to know why our forces are in Bosnia and how long they must stay. The provision in this bill requires such a statement.

The President is also expected to submit a supplemental appropriations request for additional amounts needed to maintain our forces in Bosnia if he decides to keep them there without damaging the readiness or the quality of life of our Armed Forces.

Virtually every program funded in this bill when we originally passed it the House and the Senate were funded differently. And ultimately we had to find a compromise level between those two bills. We actually had to eliminate some $4.5 billion of items that were funded in one bill or the other.

Let me point out just some instances.

In the case of the Dual Use Applications Program, we sustained the full $125 million that was provided by the Senate. That is $25 million more than the House had provided.

On ACTD's, we reached an even split with the House, which provides $81 million—nearly a 50 percent increase compared to the level appropriated for fiscal year 1997.

For overseas humanitarian, disaster, and civic aid, we again split the difference with the House providing $47 million.

One program where we sustained the full administration request is in the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, known as the ''Nunn-Lugar'' initiative.

Secretary Cohen made the strong plea for the full $382 million sought by the President, and we have convinced the conference to accommodate that request.

I again want to thank all conferees on both sides, and especially the House Chairman, Congressman BILL YOUNG, and the ranking member, Congressman JACK MURTHA.

I feel very proud about the work that was done by the conference working as a team.

I urge all Members of the Senate to vote in favor of approving the conference report before the Senate.

I reserve the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. INOUYE. Mr. President, I rise this moment to express my complete support for the conference report on the defense appropriations bill for fiscal year 1998.

As Chairman STEVENS noted, this bill is within the budget allocation provided by the committee for defense funding.

The amounts provided represents an increase of $5.4 billion, 2 percent above the amounts available during the current fiscal year.

Mr. President, it is my view that this increase is very modest, and is fully justified under the circumstances.

The increase is necessary to allow us to continue to modernize our forces, to protect readiness, and to fully fund a 2.8-percent cost-of-living increase for our men and women in uniform. And it allows us to protect the priorities of the Members of the Senate.

This conference agreement is a compromise which I believe all Members should support.

The bill was passed by the House with two controversial matters to which the administration strongly objected to—the B–2, and Bosnia. This conference report has dealt with those matters to the satisfaction of the administration.

On the B–2 bomber, the conferees have provided the President with $331 million to begin the purchase of additional B–2 bombers. However, it is up to the President to determine whether to buy more aircraft, or to upgrade the existing fleet of B–2 bombers. Mr. President, I for one hope the President chooses to buy more B–2's. But here the choice is his.

On Bosnia, the conferees agreed that consistent with the current plans of