

Supporters of the voucher plan say District of Columbia should provide choices to parents. They say District of Columbia should have charter schools. They call for partnerships between city schools and the Smithsonian Institution. The truth is that District of Columbia has all of these things. The District has public school choice. There is a charter school program at a school not six blocks from the Capitol. Down the street there is a middle school which has entered into a partnership with the Smithsonian. D.C. public schools are the only public schools in the area that provide an all day kindergarten program, and every high school in the District is a magnet school.

A lot of attention has been paid to the fact that the schools didn't open on time this year, and Congress is not without responsibility for the delay. But very little mention has been made of the rigorous standards that have been put into place in every school, here. Starting this school year, teachers, parents, and students have a clear idea of what the children should know at each grade level. Last week, students all across the District were tested in reading, math, and language arts to see what level they are at. At the end of the school year, they will be tested again, to assess their progress. The performance of teachers and principal also will be based on these assessments. The pressure is on not to let a single child slip through the cracks, and I think that is an enormous step in the right direction.

Teachers and principals are turning up the heat on parents, as well. Parents of students in D.C. public schools are signing compacts, agreeing to be full participants in their child's education. They are visiting classrooms, to see first-hand what and how their children are learning. They are becoming responsible for making sure their children do their homework, and parents are being asked to check the work and sign it. They are being asked to read to their children regularly. I ask unanimous consent that an article from the Washington Post, dated September 28, 1997, about back to school night at a local school be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

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

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. CHAFEE. Mr. President, these are improvements that will help all of the students in the District of Columbia schools, not just 3 percent of the students. Let's support what works for all of the children, not just a handful of them. That's the point of public education.

I plan to vote against the voucher plan and urge my colleagues to do the same. Let's send a clear message to General Becton and the teachers, parents, and students in D.C. schools: We support your efforts to make your local schools better for everyone.

#### EXHIBIT 1

[From the Washington Post, Sept. 28, 1997]

#### BACK TO WORK FOR SCHOOLS

(By Courtland Milloy)

"Good evening," W. Irene Woodard, the Watkins Elementary School principal, said melodically. The parents seated before her nodded politely.

"I said, 'Good evening,'" Woodard repeated, not so sweet as before. "When I say, 'Good evening,' I expect you to sing."

It was Back to School Night, and apparently I wasn't the only parent feeling somewhat demoralized by the delayed opening of D.C. public schools. No school for the first three weeks of September, and then, when it did start last week, some schools still had not received all of the necessary books and supplies.

"Don't look so dreary," said Channita Fraser, the Watkins PTA president. "When you come to meetings, smile." She began to sing in Spanish, "The more we get together, the happier we'll be."

People like Woodard and Fraser made it hard for me to just sit and stew in my juices. The way they saw it, there was no time for sulking or complaining. Our children needed help, and they needed it fast.

"Because of the delay in the opening of school, we're going to need parental cooperation like never before," said Ellen Costello, who heads PTA fund-raising for Watkins.

To make sure it gets the resources it needs, an abundance of candy and holiday wrapping paper must be sold. Parents with the means could make donations directly to their children's classrooms, she said.

"Last year, we raised \$22,000," Costello told the parents. "The money was used to fix up the school library. But more is needed to purchase copy paper and make copy machine repairs. We're also trying to get water coolers for each classroom. Remember, we live in the District of Columbia, and we don't have much money."

That notion—that we live in the District, ergo, we don't have much money—was going to take me more than one Back to School Night to get used to. The tax bite out of my paycheck said otherwise. D.C. public schools get more than \$500 million a year to educate about 78,000 students. You'd think we'd have all the amenities of an elite private school.

Instead, I was told, my third-grader would be expected to take on the equivalent of a part-time job as a candy bar salesman just so his school could get money to buy supplies. But there I go being negative again.

"We had 142 students who sold something last year," Costello reported. "That's only a 33 percent participation rate, and we need to raise it."

I was particularly impressed with my child's teacher, Kimberly Sakai. She's from Hawaii. This is her first year teaching in D.C. public schools, and she has brought to the job all of the enthusiasm you'd expect of a person who doesn't know any better.

"Our class will be starting a new social studies program that focuses on D.C.," Sakai told parents. "Strange how D.C. schools don't have a program that focuses exclusively on Washington. Hawaii is very big on learning about D.C. How can we bypass D.C.? We're going to get to know our community and our government and go on lots of field trips."

Then she asked us to fork over \$3 each for a subscription to a weekly children's current events magazine.

More important than raising money, however, is getting parents to support their children's teachers. To that end, we all signed a "parent contract." Instead of giving parents money to escape the public school system, as a school voucher would, a parent contract

pledges parents to work to improve the schools that their children already attend.

An exchange that occurred between a teacher and a parent at the meeting last week revealed the need for greater parental commitment.

Teacher: "Each child will have a homework folder with his or her assignments written down in it, and I expect you to check it and sign it before your child returns."

Parent, sounding distressed: "You aren't going to assign homework every night, are you?"

Teacher: "I'll try not to give them homework on Fridays."

Parent, with a sigh of relief: "Thank you."

That parent, judging from the way she was dressed, probably had just come from work. She might have had another full-time job as a housekeeper waiting for her when she got home. Understandably, more homework for her child meant more work for her.

And yet, I would have thought that all D.C. schoolteachers—just to make up for the three-week delay—would be piling on the homework. And I wouldn't expect them to let up on Fridays either, especially for third- and fifth-graders, whose progress is being measured against national standards for the first time this year.

I could only vow that my child would have homework every night, whether his teachers assigned it or not. Somehow, the expectations for our children must be raised.

"For all of the resources and services that we have, our children are not achieving at the level that they are capable of," Woodard told the parents. "We all must work harder on that. We especially need parents to enhance and extend what is going on in the classroom."

"Be sure that your children are reading a great deal of books, and be sure that they are understanding what they read."

Sounds like homework to me.

#### MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 4:24 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Goetz, one of its reading clerks, announced that pursuant to the provisions of section 154 of title 2, United States Code, as amended by section 1 of Public Law 102-246, the Chair announces the Speaker's appointment of the following member on the part of the House to the Library of Congress Trust Fund Board: Mr. Wayne Berman of the District of Columbia to fill the existing vacancy thereon.

At 6:28 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following joint resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.J. Res. 94. Joint resolution making continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 1998, and for other purposes.

#### EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC-3043. A communication from the General Counsel of the Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, eleven