from the floor. It is not acceptable to me to have someone bring a bill to the floor that is amendable and then tell us, ''By the way, we have established a gate here, and the only people who can go through the gate are the ones we decide can go through the gate.''

The Coverdell IRA proposal, in my judgment, ought to be amended by a range of other proposals. One, for example, deals with reducing class size. I have a daughter in the third grade. Last year, that daughter was in a public school class with 30 students—30 in a class. Do I have a self-interest here as a parent? Of course I do. Do we think kids do better when they are in a smaller class? Of course they do. We know that. The studies demonstrate that.

The question before us is not just about Coverdell IRAs, but about what our priorities are going to be. One hundred years from now, all of us in the Chamber are going to be gone.

Mr. DODD. Except STROM THURMOND.

Mr. DORGAN. Except Senator THURMOND. But historians will be able to look back at what we did here and evaluate, by looking at how we decided to spend money, what our priorities were. What did we place first? What did we think was important? Kids? Education? What kind of legislation did we pass to advance these issues that are important to public education in this country?

Finally, to those who say the public education system in this country is somehow unworthy of keeping, I ask them, how did this country get to where it is? How did we get here? Is anybody going out to the airport this afternoon to get on a plane and leave? Have they found a better place to live? I don't think so.

We have had in this country a wonderful system of public education. We also have some outstanding private schools. Our obligation in this Chamber is to provide the support that we can, especially with niche financing. We don't provide the bulk of financing for elementary and secondary education, but we provide important funds to support a number of priorities in public education. That is our job. That is what we need to do.

But we were told last week that because a bill is brought to the floor dealing with education—a bill that essentially provides tax breaks for those who want to send their kids to private school—somehow we are being selfish for saying let's amend this so we invest in and strengthen public schools. It seems to me that the message from all of this is that kids are not first, education is not a priority. Isn't that how you would view it?

Mr. DODD. I thank my colleague from North Dakota. I think he said it very well. Of course, he brings some firsthand information to it, talking about his own daughter who is in the third grade and the size of her classroom. It provides a wonderful example of something we might do to help out our local school districts.

Education is very expensive, and the bulk of it is paid for by local property taxes, sales taxes; in some States by a State income tax. It is expensive. We made a commitment here years ago that we would help out with special education; we said we would contribute as much as 40 percent of the expenses to educate a child that has special needs. We have never gotten above 8 percent—never above 8 percent.

I have communities in my State of Connecticut that spend $100,000 on a child in a small town. Now, these towns surely want to help these children with disabilities, but it seems to me that is a national issue, giving children an opportunity to maximize their potential. We promised 40 percent; we have never provided more than 8.

What if we gave $1.6 billion to the States across this country that are trying to provide the education for these special needs children? I assure you, people will say thank you.

I don't think anyone would believe that a $37 tax break for children attending private schools and a $7 tax break for children attending public schools is of a higher priority than almost any other issue you can mention when it comes to the educational needs of America's children. On the close of the 20th century, when we are going to have to have the best prepared and the best educated generation we have ever produced to compete in the global resources with limited, scarce resources, we provide $1.6 billion tax cut that could be better applied to our Nation's schools. I don't think it is right, and I am hopeful the American people will be heard over the next 24 hours and say to their Members, ''Don't vote for this. Don't vote for this. Use my money wisely and well.''

Madam President, I thank our distinguished colleague from Alaska for yielding us some time to be heard on this issue.

Mr. STEVENS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR NATURAL DISASTERS AND OVERSEAS PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I have a list at the desk. I ask unanimous consent these members of the staff of the Appropriations Committee be admitted to the floor during the consideration of the supplemental.

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

The list is as follows:

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE STAFF

Carolyn E. Apostolou, Sid Ashworth, Liz Blevins, Wally Burnett, Andrew R. Cavnar, Jennifer Chartrand, Liz Connell, Christine Ciccone, Robin Cleveland, John J. Conway, Steve Cortese, Gregory Daines, Dick D'Amato, Rebecca Davies, Mary Dewald, Emelie East, Lula Edwards, James H. English, Bruce Evans, Alex Flint, and Galen Fountain.

Carole Geagley, Andrew Givens, Rachelle Graves, Scott Gudes, David Gwaltney, Tom Hawkins, Susan Hogan, Charlie Houy, Ginny James, Kevin Johnson, Jon Kamark, Jay Kimmitt, Lashawnda Leftwich, Paddy Link, Kevin Linsky, Mary Marshall, Sue Masica, Mazie Mattson, Anne McInerney, and Jim Morhard.

Mary Beth Nethercutt, Joseph Norrell, Dona Pate, Tammy Perrin, Martha Scott Poindexter, Robert W. Putnam, Dana Quam, John Raffetto, Michelle Randolph, Pat Raymond, Gary Reese, Barbara Ann Retzlaff, Tim Reiser, Peter Rogoff, Joyce Rose, Terry Sauvain, Marsha Simon, Jennifer Stiefel, Lisa Sutherland, Betty Lou Taylor, Scott Thomasson, Justin Weddle, Paul Weinberger, and John Young.

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, on page 18 of our committee report, it stated that $10 million is provided for the national forest system account within the Forest Service. This does not accurately reflect the action taken in the committee markup. We added $2 million for payments to States, pursuant to section 405 of the bill. The total in the bill for the national forest system should be $12 million. I ask that the bill be corrected accordingly.

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

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, the Senator from Georgia is here and wishes to have time while we are on the defense bill to respond to the Senators from Massachusetts and Connecticut.

I announce to the Senate, as soon as the Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, arrives he will present an amendment and that amendment will be voted on at 5:30 today. It would be my hope that we also would be able to take a series of amendments prior to that time, amendments that we have been working on with individual Senators. It should take us 20 to 30 minutes to deal with four or five amendments that will be accepted.

I ask unanimous consent the Senator from Georgia be allowed a time now not to exceed the time taken by the Senators from Massachusetts and Connecticut and that time take place as soon as possible.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Reserving the right to object, and I shall not, I wonder whether or not, before the Senator from Arizona comes to the floor, I might have 10 minutes to speak on education following Senator COVERDELL, if there is time.

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I am a little reluctant. What we are getting into is an equal time situation. Every time one Senator speaks the other side wants to answer. If we can find some way to add the Senator's time to what has already been used on your side of the aisle on the education matter and agree now how long that will be—the leader wants some time, too. The Senator is entitled, as I understand, to about 25 or 26 minutes already because of the statements made

concerning education, if we follow an equal time proposition. I do want the floor at no later than 10 minutes of 5 o'clock to go into these other amendments, and even prefer to have it before that.

Mr. COVERDELL. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. STEVENS. I yield to the Senator.

Mr. COVERDELL. I wonder, to facilitate this so the response can be conclusive, if the Senator from Minnesota would agree to taking the next 5 or 6 minutes or so and make a statement and then we would take our 30 minutes at that point and try to respond to the other side.

Would that facilitate the Senator from Minnesota?

Mr. STEVENS. Would that meet the Senator's approval? We want to get back to the defense bill before the afternoon is over.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Madam President, I can do it. I will need about 10 minutes. I am pleased to do it either way. Since I am on the floor, I wanted to make sure I had a chance to speak. If the Senator from Georgia would rather I precede him, and he wants to respond to all of us, we will get a chance to get back to this. I would love to respond to what my colleague from Georgia has to say, but I am pleased to do it that way.

Mr. STEVENS. I say to my friend, the difficulty is that we started off with what was supposed to be 5 minutes for each Senator and that turned into 26 minutes and now we are about ready to do the same thing. I do want to limit the time. I hope he will agree with me that we will proceed and the Senator would take his 10 minutes now and the Senator from Georgia has 35 minutes. I will still be back here by 25 minutes of 5 o'clock.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

SUBSTANTIVE DEBATE ON EDUCATION

Mr. WELLSTONE. Let me thank the Senator from Georgia for his graciousness and let me thank my colleague from Alaska.

Madam President, I think there are two different issues that we are confronted with as we address the Coverdell bill. One of them has to do with just the substantive debate about education, which I want to talk about for a few minutes; and the other has to do with, I guess, the Senate process, which I think is equally important, as we think about the Senate and how we do our work together.

On the substance, I simply say to my colleague I spend about every 2 weeks in a school somewhere in Minnesota. If I could think of any one area that I feel I have the most passion about, it is education: education of children, preschool, young people, high school, higher ed. For that matter, since I think education is preschool all the way to 85 or 90, education, period.

As I travel the country, with a special emphasis in Minnesota, I say to my colleague, I can think of much better uses and a higher priority for $1.6 billion to be spent. I put the emphasis not in the direction that my colleague from Georgia goes in, which is people being able to put this money into IRAs. Not a whole lot of families I know have $2,000 they can put into IRAs. This disproportionately benefits people who are fairly well off. It benefits people who especially want to send their kids to private schools and who have the resource to do so. I would rather make an all-out effort to support the public school system.

I would be pleased to come back to the U.S. Senate some day, the sooner the better, and maybe in a debate change my mind and say that I would be all for applying taxpayers' money to support for private education—and that is why I say the sooner the better—but not until we have made the commitment to public education, not until we rebuild crumbling schools around the country; I have been to too many of those schools in Minnesota, and all around the country as well, and not until we reduce class size, not until we get more teachers and teacher assistants into the classrooms, and not until we have more resources for professional development, not until we make an all-out commitment to really deal with the learning gap between children who do well in school and children who don't do well in school, which starts, I might say, with a real commitment and the resources to early childhood development. I think the medical evidence is irreducible and irrefutable; if we don't get it right for these children by age 3, many of them will never be able to do well in school or well in life.

I don't understand what I think is a misplaced priority that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have about $1.6 billion that doesn't go directly to public education. And I put the emphasis, and I think the vast majority of the people in the United States of America would put the emphasis, on rebuilding the crumbling schools, on reducing class size, on making sure that we have the best education for our teachers and, I might argue, making sure we do our very best by way of children so that when children come to kindergarten, they come ready to learn. That is where we ought to be investing our resources—not in allocating resources to support private education, not in a Coverdell bill where the benefits disproportionately go to those families which least need those benefits.

The second point speaks more to the majority leader than my colleague from Georgia. I don't have a corner on the truth and I do not want to come off arrogant, but this argument that the majority leader makes about getting to decide what kind of amendments are relevant and dramatically reducing the number of amendments that are out here on the floor presupposes that there aren't any number of different ways of thinking about what is really helpful for education and the development of children and young people in this country.

I have a number of amendments that I think are important. I think the amendment on rebuilding crumbling schools is right on the mark. I think we devalue children and we devalue the work of adults who work with children when we don't make an investment in rebuilding these crumbling schools. I think reducing class size and more teachers in the classroom is extremely important. If I am going to think about ways of making better use of $1.6 billion, we ought to get back to making sure young people have the hope to go on to higher education. The HOPE scholarship with tax credits that aren't refundable doesn't help very many families in Georgia or Minnesota with incomes under $28,000 a year. Spend a little time in community colleges. The education is not affordable. I have an amendment to take that $1.6 billion and make higher education more affordable for these men and women from working families.

I have an amendment, since we are talking about children and education, that deals with the cuts we made in the Food Stamp Program, the major safety net program for poor children in America. We made a 20 percent cut in food stamp benefits. The vast majority of the beneficiaries are children. The vast majority of beneficiaries are working poor families. Every single doctor and every single scientist and every single nutritional expert will tell you children don't do well in school when they are malnourished. They don't do well in school when they don't have enough to eat. I think we ought to restore that funding for the Food Stamp Program as it applies to children in America. That is a top priority education program.

Now we have a majority leader who is saying, ''No, I don't want to have debate on all these amendments.'' What are my colleagues afraid of? Why would it be too much time to take 4 or 5 days or a week and debate this piece of legislation?

I have another amendment which I think is terribly important and I think it has everything in the world to do with how well kids do in school. We, right now, all around the country, are saying to single parents—and I spoke about this last week—mainly women, you can't stay in college because of the welfare bill. You have to leave school. Take a job at $6 an hour with no health care benefits. You know what. If those single parents —that means they have children—are able to finish their college education, it means better earnings, better opportunities for their children, more self-esteem for the parent, better educational achievement by