Under the 1998 H–1B bill, the amount of funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) K–12 activities was fairly small—less than $6 million in FY 2000. Thanks to the leadership of Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator KENNEDY, this legislation would more than double that amount to $15 million.

We can make further progress in our education and training needs by increasing the fee that sponsors pay for H–1B visas. Hopefully, the Conference Committee will increase the fee to $1000 more than tripling the amount made available for job training grants, low income scholarships and NSF enrichment courses—opportunities, which in the long-term, will produce a better trained American workforce. The bill before us today does not increase the fee because the Senate can not originate a revenue measure. However, I supported the bill because of a commitment made by both Republicans and Democrats on the Judiciary Committee to increase the fee to $1000 when the bill goes to conference with the House.

The focus on technology training for teachers addresses a critical need, one that I've fought for in my home state of Michigan. That is why I'm happy to note that we've included language in this bill, which I proposed, with the support of Senator CONRAD, specifying that the NSF should make teacher training in the integration of technology into the math and science curriculum a priority in funding projects from resources provided under this legislation. My office will be working with the National Science Foundation as they develop programs to be funded under this legislation so that investments in such professional development will lead the list of funding initiatives.

This provision is essential if we are going to realize the full potential of our investment in new technology in the classroom. So few of our school districts have been able to offer state-of-the-art training, or any training at all for that matter, to their teaching staff. Last year, a report by Education Week's National Survey of Teachers' Use of Digital Content revealed some startling findings relative to the lack of teacher training in integrating technology into the curriculum. In a national poll of over 1,400 teachers, 36 percent of teachers responded that they received absolutely no training in integrating technology in the curriculum; another 36 percent said they had only received 1 to 5 hours of such training; 14 percent received 6 to 10 hours of such training; and only 7 percent received between 11–20 hours.

This bill is an important step towards addressing this problem, a step that I hope is followed by many others. We are fortunate in my state and across this country to find in the ranks of teachers men and women who are deeply committed to helping America's children learn. I believe we have to match their commitment to our children with our own commitment to helping them acquire the skills they seek to be effective educators in the digital age.

I also supported this bill because it guarantees that H–1B visas will be made available to those working at educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and non-profit or governmental research organizations. Currently, these institutions, who recruit scholars and researchers with the highest possible credentials, are forced to compete with for profit companies for the limited number of visas available, and have had difficulties obtaining H–1B visas for their prospective employees.

Some of those visa holders are people like Thomas Hofweber, a first-year assistant professor in the Philosophy Department at the University of Michigan, who has conducted research in the areas of metaphysics and epistemology and is believed to be among the most talented young metaphysicians in the world. Another H–1B visa holder at Michigan State University's Department of Agricultural Economics is a researcher and teacher in Agribusiness Management and brings an outstanding background in the economics of horticultural enterprises and the management of their labor forces.

It is of great benefit for Michigan students to be able to study with these scholars. I am pleased that universities and research institutions will be able to obtain more needed visas under this bill.

VISA WAIVER PERMANENT PROGRAM ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, H.R. 3767, as amended, is passed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATIONS OF MICHAEL J. REAGAN, OF ILLINOIS, TO BE U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS; SUSAN RITCHIE BOLTON, OF ARIZONA, TO BE U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA; MARY H. MURGUIA, OF ARIZONA, TO BE U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now go into executive session and proceed to the consideration en bloc of Executive Calendar Nos. 652, 654, and 655, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Michael J. Reagan, of Illinois, to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Illinois;

Susan Ritchie Bolton, of Arizona, to be U.S. District Judge for the District of Arizona;

Mary H. Murguia, of Arizona, to be U.S. District Judge for the District of Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, we are here today in the crunch of end-of-session business to debate and take time on four noncontroversial judicial nominees. This debate today was demanded by Senate Democrats who, ironically, have stood in the way of these nominations made by President Clinton, their own President. These are Clinton nominees the Democrats are holding up, Clinton nominees whom Democrats are insisting we take precious time to debate.

For the past few years, Senate Democrats have threatened shutdowns, claimed the existence of a so-called judicial vacancy crisis, and complained of race and sex bias in order to push through President Clinton's judicial nominees. These allegations are false.

First, there is and has been no judicial vacancy crisis. consider, for example, the Clinton administration's statements on this issue. At the end of the 1994 Senate session, the Clinton administration in a press release entitled ''Record Number of Federal Judges Confirmed'' took credit for having achieved a low vacancy rate. At that time, there were 63 vacancies and a 7.4 percent vacancy rate. The Clinton administration's press release declared: ''This is equivalent to 'full employment' in the . . . federal judiciary.'' Today, there are 67 vacancies—after the votes today there will be only 63 vacancies, the same as in the 1994. Instead of declaring the judiciary fully employed as they did in 1994. Democrats claim that there is a vacancy crisis.

In fact, the Senate has confirmed President Clinton's nominees at almost the same rate as it confirmed those of Presidents Reagan and Bush. President Reagan appointed 382 Article III judges. Thus far, the Senate has confirmed 373 of President Clinton's nominees and, after the votes today, will have confirmed four more. During President Reagan's two terms, the Senate confirmed an average of 191 judges. During President Bush's one term, the Senate confirmed 193 judges. After these four judges are confirmed today, the Senate will have confirmed an average of 189 judges during each of President Clinton's two terms.

Second, there has not been a confirmation slowdown this year. Comparing like to like, this year should be compared to prior election years during times of divided government. In 1988, the Democrat-controlled Senate confirmed 41 Reagan judicial nominees. After these four nominees are confirmed today, the Republican Senate this year will have confirmed 39 of President Clinton's nominees—a nearly identical number.

In May, at a Judiciary Committee hearing, Senator BIDEN, the former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, said: ''I have told everyone, and I want to tell the press, if the Republican Party lets through more than 30 judges