

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I object en bloc to further proceedings on these bills at this particular time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the rules, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

The Chair recognizes the Senator from Vermont.

#### EDUCATION

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, this morning, I, Senator KENNEDY, Congressman BOEHNER, the Chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, and Congressman MILLER, the ranking Democrat of that committee, met with President Bush to discuss his very ambitious education initiative.

The package the President is putting forward today contains several areas where there is general, bipartisan agreement for providing the tools necessary for every child to receive a quality education.

These areas include: strengthening accountability to improve student performance; providing the funds necessary to prepare, recruit, and train high quality teachers; developing reading initiatives to ensure that all students will be able to read by the third grade; strengthening early childhood programs; creating a math/science partnership for states, colleges, and universities to strengthen K through twelve math and science education; providing activities related to technology as a means to boost student achievement; and giving school districts the flexibility to be innovative in implementing reform.

All Americans agree that every child in this country deserves a high quality education. We at the federal level must remember that we do not necessarily have all the answers for making high quality education accessible to all students. It is parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school personnel, state and local school board officials, and students that have many of the answers.

The proposal outlined by President Bush is a very good framework which will go a long way in providing the assistance that is needed at the state and local level to have a first-rate elementary and secondary educational system.

It is critical that all of us in the Senate and in the House join with the President in making comprehensive education reform our top priority. It is essential to our economic survival.

Almost half of all adults have neither completed high school nor have pursued any type of postsecondary education. Approximately twenty percent of all eighteen year olds do not graduate from high school.

The most recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study indicates that fourth graders performed well in both math and science in comparison to students in other nations. U.S. eighth graders performed near the international average in both math and science, and U.S. twelfth graders scored below the international average

and among the lowest of the participating nations in general science knowledge.

It is perhaps this last statistic which has contributed to the fact that half of all college students must take at least one remedial course at an annual cost of one billion dollars to the nation's public universities.

Last fall, Congress passed the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act. This initiative raises the cap on the number of H-1B visas to 195,000 a year for the next three years.

The H-1B bill, which passed the Senate by a vote of 96-1, was needed because this nation is lacking a skilled workforce in the areas of high tech and health care.

I hope that the sense of urgency that prevailed regarding the passage of the H-1B bill will lead all of us to pass an education reform package that will help create a workforce with the skills to meet the needs of our local, regional, national, and international economies.

I look forward to working with the President, Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, all members of the Health and Education Committee, all members of this body and our counterparts in the House to develop a bipartisan bill that passes the Congress with a final vote tally similar to the final vote cast on the H-1B bill.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from Nevada.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, so Members have some idea of what is going to happen, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Maine be recognized for 5 minutes, the Senator from New Hampshire, Mr. GREGG, for 5 minutes, and the Senator from Illinois for 15 minutes, and the floor would be obtained by the Senator from Texas, Mrs. HUTCHISON.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I amend that by asking unanimous consent that the majority leader be recognized immediately following Senator DURBIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, the Chair recognizes the Senator from Maine.

#### EDUCATION REFORM

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I am very pleased that President Bush today has sent forth to the Congress a package of education reforms that carries through on his promise to make improving the education of our children his top priority. I believe the program he has proposed sets forth the basis for a bipartisan reform bill that I hope we will very shortly consider.

Last August, President Bush traveled to Maine with, Roderick Paige, now his Secretary of Education, and met with educators from my State. I was ex-

tremely impressed with his heartfelt commitment to improving the education of all the children in America, and with the progress that he has made in the State of Texas on what is perhaps the greatest challenge our country faces; that is, narrowing the achievement gap between disadvantaged, low-income children and their more advantaged peers.

We know today that 70 percent of the fourth graders in the highest poverty schools cannot read at the basic level. That is both shameful and unacceptable, and it is a compelling reason why I so strongly support the President's pledge to leave no child behind. I am particularly pleased that his education package contains two provisions that will be very helpful to my home State of Maine.

I am very proud of Maine's public schools. We do very well in providing a quality education for all of our children. But we, like the Presiding Officer, have many school districts that are very small. They find it very difficult to cope with the rules, redtape and paperwork that apply to literally hundreds of Federal programs. The President's proposal would allow school districts to consolidate many of these programs and use the money for their most pressing needs. One school may need to hire more math and science teachers. Another may need to have computers in the classroom. Still another may need to provide a new program for gifted and talented programs. Yet another may have new construction needs. By allowing more flexibility in the use of Federal funds, President Bush has sent a strong signal that he trusts parents, teachers, and local school boards to know what is best for their students and give them the flexibility they need while holding them strictly accountable for improved student achievement. Isn't that what really counts?

We want to be certain that our children are learning. What we don't need is too much of our educators' attention diverted to whether or not they filled out some Federal form correctly. I am very pleased that is an important focus of President Bush's election package.

I am also delighted that he has included legislation authored by Senator KYL of Arizona and myself that will allow teachers to have a tax deduction of up to \$400 to help defray the costs when teachers, out of their own pockets, buy supplies for their classrooms. We all know teachers do this every day. Indeed, according to a study by the National Education Association, the average K-12 teacher spends \$408 annually on classroom materials. By enacting our proposal, we can send a message of appreciation to teachers who are so dedicated to their students that they reach deep into their own pockets to buy supplies to enhance