

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

their classrooms. We ought to help these dedicated professionals defray the costs associated with such classroom expenses.

I would like to see that bill broadened to allow all teachers to deduct the costs of professional development courses they undertake at their own expense. I know in the State of Maine we have many dedicated teachers who, at their own expense, pursue their education to make them even better teachers. I think we should help defray those expenses as well.

I look forward to working as a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, with the Presiding Officer, Senator JUDD GREGG who has been such a leader on this issue, our distinguished chairman, JIM JEFFORDS, and with many on both sides of the aisle who are committed to the goals and the challenges the President has set forth for us today. The President has challenged us to ensure that every child in America, no matter where she lives or the income level of her family, will have the very best public education possible. I intend to answer the President's challenge.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield any remaining time of my 5 minutes to Mr. GREGG, the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Maine for her courtesy. I also wish to thank the Senator from Illinois for his courtesy in allowing us to go in front of him even though he has been waiting.

I want to join in congratulations of the President for putting forward his education package and fulfilling a promise he made during the election, which was that education would be the President's first legislative initiative. As such, he has put together a package which has many very strong points which will significantly improve our educational system in this country. The package, as I would describe it, can be divided into four elements.

First, it focuses on children. It sees children as the fundamental element of our educational system, which seems only logical but regrettably has not been true over the last few years. In fact, over the past 20 years we have spent over \$127 billion on title I, but rather than spending it on children and having it be child focused, it has been institution focused or it has been bureaucracy focused. The President is shifting that title I money towards the child.

Second, the President is proposing much more flexibility to local school districts, to the teachers, to the principals, and, most importantly, flexibility to the parents because they are the folks on the front line who are most concerned about the child's education and who understand how best to do that.

The educational system changes from not only State to State, not only com-

munity to community but literally classroom to classroom. The needs within a classroom are different. The needs in one first grade classroom in the community are different from the needs in the first grade classroom in another town in New Hampshire. Flexibility is extremely important. That is a major element of their initiative.

Third, the President has focused on academic achievement. What an important goal. But it is, unfortunately, a goal we have forgotten. In fact, we have forgotten it in such a way that today our low-income children aren't achieving at all. As I mentioned yesterday on the floor, the average fourth grader from a low-income family is reading at a second-grade level, below his peers, even though we have spent literally billions of dollars focused on that low-income child. Academic achievement is critical.

He has pointed to the fact that the academic achievement of the child begins by having the child reach school ready to read. He has committed a huge amount of resources and a number of new programmatic initiatives to make sure that when our children get to school they are ready to read because, as he has pointed out, if you leave a child behind in the first grade, that child never catches up; they fall further behind.

The fourth element is one of the core elements of his proposal. He has talked about accountability. We are no longer going to send funds out to the communities without expecting results. We are no longer going to tolerate a system which leaves children behind, which says to children: We are simply going to shuffle you through the system; we are going to use the money for whatever happens to be the need for the day; but if it doesn't improve the results, we are not going to be held accountable. We will teach new math, and if you don't learn any math, that doesn't matter. If we teach you any methods of reading, and if you don't learn, that doesn't matter; you will shuffle through the system.

The President has said that from now on we are going to expect academic achievement and we are going to hold the systems accountable to results in academic achievement.

Those four goals are the right goals: Focusing the effort on the child, giving flexibility to the people who know how to educate so they can educate well, expecting academic achievement, and holding the school systems and the administrators accountable for academic achievement. I congratulate all those initiatives. This is a huge conceptual package with a lot of different initiatives performed in a variety of different ways.

I also hope we focus on moving down the educational road, the issue of special education, and the fact that we as a Republican Congress have committed our effort to try to fully fund special education. Certainly I hope that will be carried forward. I know this President is committed to that approach, also.

Nothing will free up local dollars more effectively and make more dollars genuinely available for good education than if the Federal Government pays its fair share of special education so the local tax dollars can be used where the local community thinks they can most effectively be used.

This package is a call to arms for an improvement in our educational system. It lays out specific guideposts of how to get there. I congratulate the President for putting it forward.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair recognizes the Senator from Illinois for up to 15 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. How much time is remaining on the other side of the 30 minutes they were allocated?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Eleven and one-half minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. It is my understanding I have been recognized for 15 minutes and at the conclusion of the 15 minutes the majority leader will be recognized; then I would like to ask that Senator BINGAMAN be recognized after the majority leader. I make that request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, Senator HUTCHISON follows the majority leader.

Following that, Senator BINGAMAN will be recognized.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I will yield to Senator BINGAMAN in the spirit of going back and forth, but I would like to ask that Senator CRAIG be able to follow Senator BINGAMAN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator amend his unanimous consent request?

Mr. DURBIN. I want to make sure I understand it. After I speak and the majority leaders speaks, Senator CRAIG would be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Senator BINGAMAN would be recognized, then Senator CRAIG.

Mr. DURBIN. After the time for majority leader, Senator HUTCHISON and Senator CRAIG would be within the 11 minutes allocated?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader's time is extra.

Mr. DURBIN. Understood.

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

NEW PRIORITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues for coming together on the floor this morning. All Members who were present on Saturday for the inauguration of the new President realize it was an exciting and historic moment for our Nation. The weather did not cooperate; it was pretty miserable outside. We all felt honored to be there, to see once again this unique part of American history where we transfer power peacefully, even when we have been fighting like cats and dogs between the political parties leading up to the election.