

NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS
WEEK

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 125, submitted earlier today by Senators GREGG, LIEBERMAN, and others.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 125) designating April 28, 2003, through May 2, 2003, as "National Charter Schools Week," and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, today my colleagues, Senators LIEBERMAN, FRIST, ALEXANDER, CARPER and BAYH, joined me in the introduction of S. Res. 125, a resolution to designate the week of April 28 through May 2, 2003, as National Charter Schools Week. This year marks the 11th anniversary of the opening of the Nation's first charter school in Minnesota. In the last 11 years, we have come a long way since that auspicious moment when one teacher collaborating with parents started a public school specifically designed to meet the needs of the students in the community.

Today, we have almost 2,700 charter schools serving nearly 700,000 students. Charter schools are immensely popular: two-thirds of them report having long waiting lists, and there are currently enough students on waiting lists to fill another 1,000 average-sized charter schools. Survey after survey shows parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their children's charter schools.

Charter schools are popular for a variety of reasons. They are generally free from the burdensome regulations and policies that govern traditional public schools. They are founded and run by principals, teachers, and parents who share a common vision of education, a vision which guides each and every decision made at the schools, from hiring personnel to selecting curricula. Furthermore, charter schools are held accountable for student performance in a unique way—if they fail to educate their students well and meet the goals of their charters, they close.

Since each charter school represents the unique vision of its founders, these schools vary greatly, but all strive for excellence.

For example, the Jean Massieu Academy in Arlington, TX, was created in 1999 to serve deaf and hearing-impaired children and their siblings. All instruction at Jean Massieu is in American Sign Language, accompanied by English text. For 2 consecutive years, the academy has earned the second-highest rating in the State's accountability system based on its students' excellent performance.

Here in the District of Columbia, low-income fifth graders at KIPP DC/

KEY Academy performed remarkably in reading and math on a national test, increasing their scores by more than twice the amount children typically gain from year to year. Students and teachers at the KEY Academy log long hours, attending class from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each weekday, half a day on many Saturdays, and for much of the summer, but their hard work is obviously reaping rewards.

These are but a handful of the success stories in the charter school movement, which includes a wide range of schools serving a variety of different learning needs and styles, often at a lower cost than traditional public schools.

I expect that we will see the popularity of charter schools continue to grow. Last year, the President signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, which gives parents in low-performing schools the option to transfer to another public school. The act also provides school districts with the option of converting low-performing schools into charter schools. I believe these provisions will strengthen the charter school movement by creating more opportunities for charter school development. And, as parents exercise their right to school choice and "vote with their feet", the demand for charters schools will grow.

I commend the more than 1.6 million people involved in the charter school movement, from parents to teachers to community leaders and members of the business community. Together, they have led the charge in education reform and have started a revolution with the potential to transform our system of public education. Districts with a large number of charter schools reported becoming more customer service oriented and creating new education programs, many of which are similar to those offered by charter schools, and increasing contact with parents. These improvements benefit all our students, not just those who choose charter schools.

I encourage my colleagues to visit a charter school this week to witness firsthand the ways in which these innovative schools are making a difference, both in the lives of the students they serve as well as in the community in which they reside.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution and preamble be agreed to en bloc, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements related thereto be printed in the RECORD, without intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 125) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to. The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 125

Whereas charter schools are public schools authorized by a designated public body and

operating on the principles of accountability, parental involvement, choice, and autonomy;

Whereas in exchange for the flexibility and autonomy given to charter schools, they are held accountable by their sponsors for improving student achievement and for their financial and other operations;

Whereas 39 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have passed laws authorizing charter schools;

Whereas 39 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will have received substantial assistance from the Federal Government by the end of the current fiscal year for planning, startup, and implementation of charter schools since their authorization in 1994 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.);

Whereas 36 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are serving nearly 700,000 students in almost 2,700 charter schools during the 2002-2003 school year;

Whereas charter schools can be vehicles for improving student academic achievement for the students who attend them, for stimulating change and improvement in all public schools, and for benefiting all public school students;

Whereas charter schools must meet the same Federal student academic achievement accountability requirements as all public schools, and often set higher and additional goals, to ensure that they are of high quality and truly accountable to the public;

Whereas charter schools assess and evaluate students annually and often more frequently, and charter school student academic achievement is directly linked to charter school existence;

Whereas charter schools give parents new freedom to choose their public school, charter schools routinely measure parental approval, and charter schools must prove their ongoing and increasing success to parents, policymakers, and their communities;

Whereas more than two-thirds of charter schools report having a waiting list, the average size of such a waiting list is more than one-half of the school's enrollment, and the total number of students on all such waiting lists is enough to fill another 1,000 average-sized charter schools;

Whereas students in charter schools nationwide have similar demographic characteristics as students in all public schools;

Whereas charter schools in many States serve significant numbers of students from families with low incomes, minority students, and students with disabilities, and in a majority of charter schools almost half of the students are considered at risk or are former dropouts;

Whereas charter schools have enjoyed broad bipartisan support from the Administration, Congress, State Governors and legislatures, educators, and parents across the Nation; and

Whereas charter schools are laboratories of reform and serve as models of how to educate children as effectively as possible: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates April 28, 2003, through May 2, 2003, as "National Charter Schools Week";

(2) honors the 11th anniversary of the opening of the Nation's first charter school;

(3) acknowledges and commends the growing charter school movement and charter schools, teachers, parents, and students across the Nation for their ongoing contributions to education and improving and strengthening the Nation's public school system;

(4) supports the goals of National Charter Schools Week, an event sponsored by charter schools and charter school organizations across the Nation and established to recognize the significant impacts, achievements, and innovations of the Nation's charter schools; and

(5) requests that the President issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to conduct appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities to demonstrate support for charter schools in communities throughout the Nation.

ORDERS FOR WEDNESDAY, APRIL
30, 2003

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand in adjournment until 10 a.m., Wednesday, April 30. I further ask consent that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Senate then begin a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, provided that at 11 a.m., the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 60, S. 196, the digital and wireless technology bill, as provided under the previous order.

I further ask consent that following the vote on S. 196, the Senate return to executive session to resume the consideration of the nomination of Priscilla Owen to be a circuit judge for the Fifth Circuit.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. McCONNELL. For the information of all Senators, following morning business, the Senate will take up S.

196, the digital and wireless technology bill. Under the agreement, the Senate will vote on the measure at approximately 12 noon.

Upon the disposition of that bill, the Senate will resume consideration of the Owen nomination. The majority leader has asked me to announce that while he regrets being forced to file cloture on this important appeals court nomination, he believes it is vital that the Senate fulfill its advise and consent responsibility. With that being said, I inform my colleagues that the cloture vote on the Owen nomination will occur Thursday morning, and Members will be notified when the vote is scheduled.

I also announce to my colleagues that the majority leader is working with the Democratic leader to clear several items for floor action. The items under discussion include the State Department authorization bill, the bioshield bill, the FISA legislation, and several judicial nominations. Therefore, Members should anticipate additional votes during tomorrow's session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there was some discussion on the floor today that the minority would move to the nomination of Prado tomorrow. That is a debatable motion when we are in executive session. We have been in contact with the majority. In fact, the distinguished majority whip and I have been talking all afternoon to try to work something out. We understand the difficulty of our doing what we have said we would likely do. We acknowledge it is better that the majority sets the schedule. But there are times when we have to try to protect our rights.

I am the one who said I would do this at the first opportunity. I am not going to do that tomorrow until the ability

we have to work out a fair proposal on a number of circuit court judges is exhausted. We were very close to doing something on that tonight. I am confident the distinguished Senator from Kentucky and I can work something out tomorrow, with the consent of both of our caucuses.

So I just want to put everyone on notice that I am not going to move to Prado tomorrow and that we are going to try to work things out on our own, and that would be the most expeditious and, I am sure, best way to go. I am confident and hopeful we can do that.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I just add that the Senator from Nevada and I spent some considerable amount of time this afternoon trying to clear some additional votes for nominees for the circuit court, and we are going to continue that effort tomorrow in the hopes of reaching an agreement to dispose of some of these nominations that are going to be allowed to be voted on, on an up-or-down basis. We will continue that effort in the morning.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M.
TOMORROW

Mr. McCONNELL. If there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in adjournment under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 7:12 p.m., adjourned until Wednesday, April 30, 2003, at 10 a.m.

CONFIRMATION

Executive nomination confirmed by the Senate April 29, 2003:

THE JUDICIARY

JEFFREY S. SUTTON, OF OHIO, TO BE UNITED STATES CIRCUIT JUDGE FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT.