

House should schedule and pass H.R. 135 and H.R. 164 and show that we too in the House mean business in the fight against breast cancer.

REPUBLICAN LEGISLATION ATTACKS PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I expect to be joined in a few minutes by one of my colleagues.

This evening I would like to talk about the efforts that have been made by the Republican leadership to move various legislation which I consider essentially an attack on public education in this country.

Democrats, for a long time, certainly throughout this Congress, have stressed the need for this Congress to address education in various ways. We started out during the debate on the Balanced Budget Act this summer stressing the need for better access to higher education.

In fact, as a result of President Clinton's efforts and the efforts of the Democrats joining with him, we were able to include in the Balanced Budget Act, when it passed, some significant measures that would provide more access to higher education for the average American in terms of expanding student loan programs, providing tax deductions or tax credits that make it easier for the average American, the working American, to pay for college education or graduate education.

But now, after the Balanced Budget Act was passed, and certainly starting this fall, we have talked increasingly about the need to address the problems in our public schools, but in a very positive way. Our feeling is that the public schools in America are in pretty good shape but they certainly need improvement and that there are various ways to go about improving them.

One of the areas that we have talked about the most is the need to address the public school infrastructure. The fact of the matter is there are many public schools that have great need for repairs or even new construction because of expanded enrollment but do not have the ability within their school district to pay for those school construction or renovation needs.

In addition, there is the whole issue of basic skills; that more needs to be done to improve learning with regard to basic skills in the various public schools. And the Democrats have actually come up with a whole series of ideas about ways to improve public education, which I may get into this evening with some of my colleagues.

But before I do that, I wanted to talk about the fact that instead of emphasizing the need to improve the public schools, where better than 90 percent of

America's students are enrolled, the Republican leadership, at least in the last few weeks, has instead embarked on an effort to try to take away resources, taxpayer dollars, from the public schools and use them, or credit them, to private or religious school initiatives.

Now, the best example of that was 2 weeks ago, before we adjourned for the district work period, the Speaker actually brought to the floor as part of the D.C., District of Columbia, appropriation bill a private school voucher program. It was a provision that would basically have provided funding to a very limited number of students within the District of Columbia, I think 2,000, approximately, which is really a drop in the bucket in terms of the number of students in the D.C. Public schools, and allowed them to take that voucher and use it for private schools either in the District of Columbia or in surrounding States.

This provision initially failed to pass the House, and the reason it failed to pass was essentially because most Members, and I am one of them, do not believe that it makes sense to take resources that could be used for things like school construction in the District of Columbia, which has a great need for school construction and renovation, and instead use that money to pay for private education.

The Speaker did not have the votes, actually, for the D.C. appropriation bill, in part because of the voucher provision, but what he did was he held the vote open and he twisted some fellow Republican arms to change their votes so he finally got a majority of one to pass the bill.

Despite this near failure, and I say near failure, because the way it was done it was clearly an indication that this was not a measure that had the support of a majority within this House of Representatives, but nonetheless, even with that, keeping that in mind, the Speaker is now once again, and the Republican leadership is now once again taking another step in this same direction, taking resources that could be used for public education and using them to pour taxpayer dollars into private and religious schools.

This was a provision that was originally proposed in the Senate by Senator COVERDELL. He has called it an education savings account but, essentially, it primarily benefits wealthy families. It allows them to basically provide tax-free funds that would be used to pay for private education.

Now, Democrats, and I believe this is coming up tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, but Democrats basically will put forth an alternative that will use this money for school construction bonds to help public schools that are in disrepair or in need of new construction. Without getting into the specifics of this provision, which I oppose, I am trying to make the point, and I think we as Democrats are making the point, that we need to improve the public schools

rather than siphon Federal dollars for private schools.

We should not be giving up on the public schools. The public schools are where most of our children are educated. We have had an historic commitment to public schools in this country and, if anything, and I feel very strongly, we should be moving a Democratic initiative, which we have discussed and which our Democratic task force has put forward, that would provide improvements for public education rather than siphoning off this money for private and religious schools.

I see one of the cochairs of the Democratic education task force, which has taken the initiative to put forward these principles for America's public schools, my colleague from North Carolina, is here.

I was going to briefly, if I could, just outline some of the principles that the gentleman and his task force have put together, just to juxtapose those to what the Republican leadership has been trying to do in the last couple of weeks, and if I could just mention six very briefly.

These are the principles for America's public schools. First, an emphasis on academic excellence in the basics; second, well-trained, motivated teachers to help children achieve high standards; third, using public dollars to improve public schools rather than private school vouchers at public expense, which we have discussed; fourth, the Federal role in education that supports local initiatives for strong neighborhood public schools; fifth, empower parents to choose the best public school for their children; and, sixth, every child should have access to a safe, well-equipped public school.

Again, the task force does not take the position they are opposed to choice, but the choice should be in the public schools. We do not want to take taxpayer dollars and use them for private education.

I would like at this time to yield to my colleague, the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. ETHERIDGE], who has taken the lead on this and who has been so well-spoken because of his background and experience on the issue of public education.

□ 1815

Mr. ETHERIDGE. I appreciate the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] yielding and I appreciate very much the gentleman putting together this special order, because I think it is important to the American people to understand. Let me set a little history, if I may before we get to this because I think it is important.

I think of a great Congressman who represented the district that I now represent many years ago, a gentleman by the name of Harold Cooley, who at that time chaired the Committee on Agriculture in the U.S. Congress. It was his task to chair the Agriculture Committee during and right after World War II. Many of our young people who went

before the draft in World War II failed their physical. Congressman Cooley felt so strongly that he attached an appropriation and an authorization piece to a military authorization bill, defense bill, to provide for school lunches for the children of this Nation. Prior to that time, there had not been a hot lunch for children in our public schools across this country.

I set that tone because there are many who today say this is not the role of the Federal Government, or that is not the role of the Federal Government. Well, until about 1945, 1946, it had not been the role of the Federal Government to participate in the school lunch programs, either. I know this Congress last session, the majority, tried to strip that out, but when they heard from the American people, they changed their minds.

I will say to the gentleman, having been a superintendent for 8 years in the public schools of the State of North Carolina and having responsibility for about 1.2 million children, and having gone in those cafeterias, as a matter of fact, last week I was in 4 different schools, had lunch with two different classrooms of students, and I can tell the gentleman that instruction goes on in those schools all across America whether they are having lunch or they are in recess.

One of the things I wanted to point out was that the teacher, it happened to be International Day. Every day during the week they had a different country. One of the schools I was in, in Wilson, it happened to be the day for China. They had chop suey or they had egg rolls. What was so significant I think about it was that it was a first grade class that I was having lunch with and the teacher, and if you know first graders and kindergartners, you use your finger to point to the first letter as you start to read and they were reading to those children each line of the menu so they could identify the menu, and then they were allowed to stand in two different rows, depending on which menu they chose. It was quite obvious to me that there were children in each of those rows who had tried neither of those menus. But it was so instructive in the teachers working with them and I sat at the table with them, and we talked and of course as the gentleman can appreciate, there was a lot of media there, but they had a delightful time. But that is instruction.

I tell that little story to set the stage for what we are talking about, because Democrats are working to improve public schools in America. We have done that time and time again. We have set the tone. Education, public education, in my opinion, is the key to the foundation of our democracy. It is the one thing that helps bring people together. It is the one thing that levels the playing field for children no matter what their ethnic or economic background is, and it gives them a chance in this highly competitive world, and

without an education they do not have it. I mean that when I say all children, not just those from the privileged, not just those whose parents can afford to send them to private schools or those who might get a few vouchers. All children, because any that are left behind are the ones I think that are deprived.

I want to talk just a minute, and I hope the gentleman will join me as we get into this, about reading, because I believe reading is the foundation, that is one of the pieces that we have talked about and the President laid out in his State of the Union address so strongly. Because reading is the gateway skill, let me repeat that again, reading is the gateway skill. We talk about how important it is today in the world we live in that is so technical, it is high tech. A report has just come out in the last 10 days about how important it is to have algebra, geometry and those higher skills in math, and I certainly agree with that wholeheartedly because North Carolina required algebra of all of our students back in 1991. We were one of the first States to do that. But until a child learns to read, all the other things are off the sheet, they are off the page. It is so important to do it early.

The President had requested in this program, America Reads Challenge, to have 1 million tutors. Many of them are volunteers and we have a lot of those in our State and across this country. But I thought it was a great stroke when he said of the money we are sending to our universities, we want to develop a partnership with the universities in this country to not only just get them to go into schools but get young people to understand it is important to volunteer again, and some of them were to be paid out of the funds that are in the current budget that is now hung up in conference, and I trust it will be broken loose because unless we do it, I really believe that we will do the children of this country a grave injustice and it will cost our country in the productivity of these young people, in the productivity of our economy a tremendous amount of money.

I would say to the gentleman that parents are the first teachers. There is no question about that. They are the first teachers that a child has in every family. I do not know of a parent that does not want their child to succeed, but there are a lot of parents who are nonreaders themselves, unfortunately, in a Nation as rich and as plentiful as we have it in America. But they want their children to read, and that is why we have a program for adults.

But I am going to talk about a school I was in last week, I went in a school system. They had a tremendous program that they have been involved in now for about 5 years, and it fits right into what the President is talking about, this issue of getting 100,000 college work-study students to serve as reading tutors. There are almost 800 colleges and universities, public and private, across this country who have

now signed up to be a part of this program, assuming the funds are there. It is great to go out and teach, but what we have to have on the backside of it is accountability. I want to talk about those together.

We have to challenge every parent, teacher, principal and community member in each of our communities across this country to help get children started to learn to read by the time they are in the third grade. But to do that, we have to teach and we have to hold them accountable. We have to measure what we have done. Otherwise, we will not know how we get there. I think that is important.

It would be great if every parent would read to their child at least 30 minutes a day. Many do not. They do not have the time. But I think it would be super. And schools need to be able to provide high quality reading initiatives for all students, making sure that teachers know how to teach children to read, identify those that need extra help, and that is where the tutors come in. When you have 21 to 26 and in some cases, unfortunately, as many as 30 students in a class, a teacher cannot give the quality time that he or she wants to. They are hardworking people, they care so deeply about their children. We have to have the community members involved. America Reads Challenge, this tutoring program, is a tremendous program that we have a chance to make a difference. And businesses can be involved. The business community is involved, I know in our State, but there are more that can get involved, not only in tutoring but doing a lot of other things and encouraging parents, giving parents time off to go in and work with their children.

I would suggest they follow the lead of Johnston County schools, and I want to talk about that for just a moment because I have some charts here showing what happened when a school district says that we are absolutely going to make a difference for all of our children, not just a few, all children, and this is representative of the 100 percent of children in that school system where in 1993, only 65.8 percent of those children were what was called proficiency level. That means they could read at or above grade level and move on to the next grade. We see the next year there was a drop, and then we see progressive growth up to 76.1 percent in 1997. I predict that will continue to rise.

When we see that kind of growth in reading, a lot of good things are happening on the part of the teachers, on the part of the parents and on the part of the total community. There is great pride, there is tremendous work, and that is well above the national average as reported on NAEP. Because if we look at the numbers, we will see that in the 5-year period, they gained 11 points in their reading proficiency. But more importantly, let me show you what those points really translate into. Because what we are looking at here is a chart showing the 8th grade students,

and this is cohort data in reading. What that really means, the same group of students that were measured in 1993 were measured in 1997 in their growth patterns to see how much they had grown. If we look at the bottom cohort, which means level 1, they are not proficient, they are not doing well, and they really would not be able to move to the next grade and do the work. We see that number drop from 9.2 in 1993 down to 2.5 in 1997, almost a 7 percent drop. That represents a tremendous number of children. What is so important about that is we look at the numbers, we look at the cohort at the top, goes from 21 to 34. That is well above grade level, because the 48.6 percent here versus the 44.4 percent is really at grade level.

So we see the Johnston County School System is really doing what we want done in every school system all across our State and all across America because we are pushing more and more students up into the top two cohorts where we really need them to be proficient, to be able to handle the other things they have to do and the more sophisticated reading they need to do. Because we see in the second cohort in level 2, it drops from 25.4 down to 14.7.

If it were only in reading, it would be one thing, but let us look at what happened in math for those very same students. So it tells us we have got a system that is really doing some things because they are getting help. In 1993, students who were proficient, and that is a bar that is set. That is why when the President talks about standards it makes sense. It makes sense to talk about standards and then you measure to that standard because we have that. In 1993, it was 61.8 percent of the students in grades 3 through 8 were proficient in math. But look at the difference that 5 years made when they really began to focus, they realized what was expected. It was measured. It made a difference on the part of the parents, on the part of the students, because every student in this school system with their parent signs a contract. This is a public school system where they signed a contract. We see tremendous growth.

This is the kind of thing I think that we talk about when we talk about America Reads and the President's program of providing students a goal, providing resources, because, yes, it takes resources. But when we do it, we must have accountability and measure. And people need to know what we are doing and we get results. I think this is proof that we can improve our children's reading through our public schools. But we have to let them know what we want. Let me be the first to say, we cannot do it from Washington. But what we can do and what I think we should do and what we must do is say it is important, as the President had, and when we have done that, then we have got to be willing to stand behind it, because the job will get done at the local level.

Mr. PALLONE. What the gentleman has laid out there I think is very impressive and it really shows what can be accomplished in just a few years. I think that that is what we need to do. We need to emphasize here on the floor of the House how certain school districts have been very effective in improving basic skills and improving other aspects of public education. Because my whole point is that there are some really excellent examples of what can be done in the public schools and that I think generally most people are satisfied with the public school system but they would like to see some improvements.

Our point as Democrats has been throughout this debate, and it will continue throughout this session of Congress, that you should not be spending resources for private education when you can actually do things with some Federal help, if necessary, that would improve significantly education in the public schools. I think this is a very good example of that. The gentleman was very much involved in putting forward this Democratic agenda for first class public schools. I just mentioned briefly some of those points that the task force brought together.

□ 1830

But just to provide a little more detail, and maybe we can go back and forth and talk about some of these things, with regard to just the two issues of early childhood development, Basics by Six, and well-trained teachers, the task force, Democratic task force, mentioned a couple of things.

First of all, they said there should be the opportunity for every child to be ready to learn by the time he or she enters kindergarten, invest in early intervention, community-based programs such as Early Start, Head Start, engage parents and community stakeholders in the needs of at-risk children, use schools all day as the center of the communities for the services children need, including before and after school.

Then for well-trained teachers, that was the second point, help communities recruit and train well-qualified teachers who are certified in the subjects they teach, hire enough qualified teachers to bring down student-to-teacher ratios, incentives for qualified teachers to teach in high-need areas and strengthen parents' rights to know about teacher qualifications.

I think the point here is, because the last chart, and I think the one before, this certainly was from grades three to eight in both cases. That is eighth grade there, is that if you were able to get these kids even before they get to the third grade ready to learn, so to speak, it would make a big difference. But, again, the teachers, and having qualified teachers is an important part of this, and particularly bringing down that teacher-student ratio, because I would assume it is very difficult to improve basic skills if you have huge classrooms and because of the problems

that result from having a very high level of students versus the number of teachers.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. If the gentleman would yield, the number of studies that put that out, Tennessee is a great example as a State that spent the money, reduced class sizes and saw some tremendous results from it. There is no question that it makes a significant difference in kindergarten through third grade, because that is where children are learning the basic skills, where there is so much need for personalized attention.

If you have a large class, as you were indicating, it is very, very difficult to be able to reach them. For some students, no problem, they will sail through. But those marginal students or those who show up at the public schools with all the number of problems they show up with today makes it very, very difficult for them to be able to make it.

But if you give them the skills and give them the opportunity to learn to read, to do the basic computations to get going, and you give them the chance to find out they really can do it, it makes all the difference in the world. And you cannot do all of that, as you have indicated, without having good ongoing staff development for your teachers, and then the rest of your staff, for that matter.

Certainly they are professionals. Certainly they work hard. But I do not know of a corporation in America that pays their executives, in a lot of cases far more than we are able to pay school teachers in our public schools, that do not spend a substantial amount of money on staff development and continue to upgrade and retrain those professionals on the latest skills. Yet we say to a lot of our teachers in America, you have to be recertified, depending on the State, anywhere from five to six years. You have to have so many hours of training, and you have got to pay for it out of your own pocket.

Industry would not dare do such a thing. We would not do it. They pay for it, and yet we have to do it.

As you are well aware, the first money for that, some of that money came out of the Eisenhower money that was put in the budget back in the late fifties. That money is still important today. It is not enough. States put it in, but I can tell you in a lot of States, when their budgets got tight in the eighties and early nineties, the first dollars pulled out of those budgets, and it was not true in just one State, it was true all across America, because we know here on this floor the Federal Government only puts in between 6 and 7 percent of the dollars that flow down. The bulk of the money is State and local money.

Those were the first dollars pulled out, staff development, the very dollar you need. Once you get it out, I can tell you from being a superintendent, it is the hardest dollar to get back in.

Mr. PALLONE. One of the ironies, you are talking about Johnston County, but when we had the debate two weeks ago on the D.C. appropriations bill, and there was the proposal which actually passed after some strong-arming here to include a voucher system within that for about 2,000 D.C. school kids, and I just thought it was so ironic, because if there is any school system that has greater needs in terms of dollars, for example, for infrastructure, their schools were closed down for three weeks in the beginning at September because the judge ruled they were unsafe and wanted the schools to be fixed up or renovated before they started the school year.

What we as Democrats were saying in that debate is, you know, spend this voucher money, if you will, to better train the teachers, to fix up the schools, to improve academic performance.

One of the things we did the day of the vote is a number of us went down, we did a little march where we went from the Capitol, from the House chamber here, down to a local public school, the one that was very close to here called the Brent School. It was only a few blocks away.

But talk about innovative ideas. Like Johnston County, they are out there trying to improve the public school system in various ways. They have started a very innovative tutoring program, an after-school program that has again brought up not only the grades, but the proficiency, if you will, of the students. So basically now Brent School is a success story for the District of Columbia.

When we went there at the end of our march, we talked to some of the teachers and students. It was amazing to me. First of all, the building looked good. Secondly, I noticed a lot of students were wearing uniforms. I was not able to find out if that was a requirement or whatever, but that was something they were trying that was a little different. Maybe not every school wants to have uniforms, but they were trying it out. And it just sort of upset me to think that here is a public school within the District of Columbia trying to make improvements, having success in various ways. Let us encourage that. Let us try to get more schools within the District to do that, with how many millions of dollars is going to be made available for these school vouchers?

The same thing is true around the country. Your principles that came out of your Democrat Education Task Force, some of them involved spending money, and there will be some Federal dollars available. We know we do not have all the money in the world, and it is still primarily locally controlled, what the schools do. But it just makes no sense, it seems to me, when there are these innovative ideas, when you show in Johnston County what can be done to siphon that money away in the ways proposed two weeks ago, and in another way to be proposed tomorrow by the Republican leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I would yield back my time, and ask that the balance be given to the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. ETHERIDGE].

EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. ETHERIDGE] is recognized for the remainder of the minority leader's hour, approximately 30 minutes.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, let me respond to what the gentleman said about facilities and other things, because this is important. When you think of public schools, public schools are like a small town, they carry on a lot of the services that any town would have and they need to have basic infrastructure for water and sewer of some type. They have got to have maintenance facilities, they teach, they provide discipline and provide instruction. It is a whole multitude of things we require teachers to do and the staff of a school as well as teach.

I am reminded of people who say that the facility does not make any difference, and my friend from New Jersey was just talking about the school here in D.C. and how important it is. If your roof leaks, the first thing you have got to do is patch the roof. It is hard to say to a child, this and that is important, and they look around and find out their building is dirty, the walls need painting, the windows need fixing and the roof needs patching, and they do not perceive that education is important. That is important to fix.

Just last week I was in a brand new school in a school in my district. I went in and read to a kindergarten classroom in Rocky Mount, and in the process of reading, the school is new and it had video throughout the school, and in the process of reading to those students, I knew it was on camera, but I didn't realize, I guess I just got so involved in reading to the children, the kindergartners, I forgot it was going throughout the whole school.

So when we finished the reading of the book, the kindergartners in the class I was in applauded, and the door happened to be open, and apparently the doors to a lot of the school were open, and I could hear applause all over that school.

I tell that story because that is an example of what could happen when you have a school that has modern facilities and conveniences, and the things we talk about every day. And we talk about high-tech and the Internet and faxes and things we move quickly, and yet some of our children go to buildings every day that we would not dare put a business in. But we send children there, because they do not have any choice.

Some communities are growing so fast, they are struggling to make sure they can do it. The question is can the Federal Government do all that? No, absolutely not. But we can say it is im-

portant and our taxing policies can support that where we can, and we tried to put some money in this time. The majority would not let it go as part of the bill. I trust before this Congress adjourns, it will get another opportunity to assist in those areas where it is so important, because children do deserve a good environment in which to learn. It improves the qualities. The school ought to be one of the nicest places they attend every day. It was when I was in school, and we should not back up.

I remember, I told a group in a chamber meeting not long ago, if the facilities do not matter, then I would suggest the next time the industrial hunter goes out looking for any major client to come to town and open their business, take them to someplace in town where there is an old, run-down warehouse and say to them, you know, the facility really does not make any difference in the quality of product you are going to put out, so this is the building we are going to try to help you acquire, and see how long it is before that client is out of town and the word gets around, and you will not have an opportunity to recruit very much.

We have a responsibility I think, and I say "we," I think all of us in this country, in the Nation, that has the resources we do, to help. It is a local matter, yes, but all of us working together need to make it happen.

The last time I was in a school, which was just last Friday, I do not remember a single child, as a matter of fact, they didn't, they didn't ask who paid for anything in that school; the books, the TV, the materials they used. Children only know what they get. They do not know what they need. That is our responsibility, and I think Congress can help with that by setting the tone and saying education is important. It is one of the key components we have to deal with in this country.

It is as much, in my opinion, of our national defense in this global economy we find ourselves in, and the economic challenges we face around the world, to be able to compete economically as it is to have strong military, and I very strongly support a strong military to defend our borders.

I think we should not give up on public education. That is where the bulk of our children are. They will be there tomorrow, they will be there next week, next year, and they will be there for time to come, because there is not enough space in any other place for them. And to back away from making sure they have a quality education would be a travesty, in my opinion.

Let me touch on one other point that Mr. PALLONE mentioned in his remarks as he was going through, and he touched on facilities and standards and the whole issue of teacher assistance, teacher support, to be able to make sure that they have the support to do the job.