

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.

We need to make sure that we work with our universities in the dollars appropriated from the Federal Government, that they get more involved, as the President has now encouraged the universities to do, roughly 800 of them now, participating in the America Reads program. But we also need them to get involved in our teacher development and in our teacher recertification programs, to provide some of the latest up-to-date resources and research-based information for our teachers to use.

I know at the University of North Carolina, they are now developing a tremendous program on the Internet, and they are using graduate students to do some of the work. The reason I know about it, Mr. PALLONE, my daughter is working in it, and they will have it on line in another year or so, when teachers, when they have access to computers, they can log in, bring down some of the best lesson plans anywhere around, and use those to challenge our students in the way that they never have been challenged before.

□ 1845

It will help that teacher at the point they are working with our children. That is one of the things the President and the Vice President talked about when they are talking about having access to the Internet in every library and in every classroom. Until it is available to the teacher, my view is it will not be used the way it should be. Teachers have to be comfortable with using it, and then it becomes integrated in their instructional materials and the children will use it.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to follow up on what the gentleman mentioned. When we talk about the need to address school infrastructure, whether it is building new school buildings or renovating those that have deteriorated, the gentleman knows we have mentioned before this initiative that was essentially recommended by the President, the \$5 billion to help pay the costs of school construction bonds or the interest on school construction bonds, which the Republicans rushed and insisted that it not be part of the balanced budget agreement.

The reason why it was not I think was very unfortunate, but it is still out there, something that the gentleman's task force supports and many of my Democratic colleagues support.

We stressed that money would not be just used for buildings, but could also be used for the Internet, for rewiring, for making improvements so that the Internet or various computers, whatever, could be utilized in schools, because obviously one of the infrastructure needs, as the gentleman mentioned, that a lot of the schools do not have in this country is to address the high-tech problems, wiring, the types of things that make computers and the Internet available. So that is important. That was actually the third point of the gentleman's task force agenda.

But I just wanted to, in the small amount of time that we have left, go into another area which the gentleman mentioned in the task force, the Democratic task force recommendations. That is support for local plans to renew neighborhood public schools.

It sounds like a generic term, but when we break it down, they talked about specific things: Federal assistance for communities committed to renewing their public schools; Federal support for local school renewal plans that are developed and implemented by the community; plans to address such considerations as parental involvement, teacher training, technology enhancement.

A lot of this involves getting the community as a whole involved and at the same time getting individual parents or caretakers involved. That is so important, and it also shows how much the Democratic proposals, if you will, the task force proposals, want to build upon the community and upon parental involvement.

Oftentimes when we talk about addressing education on a Federal level and providing funding on a Federal level, we get accused from our colleagues on the other side of saying, well, you want the Federal Government to control the public schools. It is just the opposite. We want more parental involvement; we want more community involvement. We simply want the dollars to be made available, because we know that is where the crunch is.

A lot of times they do not have the dollars. If the gentleman maybe wants to discuss a little more the types of ways that communities can get involved when they get a small amount of Federal resources, because I think it is so important, I will yield to him for that purpose.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. The gentleman is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. What this was about was a reaffirmation of the fact that schools inherently are community-based. People believe very strongly in their schools.

That is why poll after poll and research and whatever says, I believe in my school, but it is the one down the road that needs changing, or the one down the road ought to have the new program, but I like what I have here. The belief there is that we ought to provide the resources to do it.

Another example, a school I am aware of a number of years ago had very little parent involvement and low test scores, which indicates that, and a lot of other problems, discipline problems.

The principal said, listen, I'm not going to put up with this. It was an area where you would say the school cannot be successful, with a lot of problems in the community, lack of involvement, et cetera. This principal decided, I am going to get them involved. She went to every house and knocked on every door, went to softball games, baseball games during the summer;

wherever parents were, this principal went.

It was a long story. Parental involvement, the PTA went from something like 10 percent to 80 percent. School scores went up dramatically; dropout rates went down. That is what we are trying to get to, is to be able to provide a resource. All this school needed was one person. One parent came and volunteered. Pretty soon they were not able to volunteer and they needed more help, so they were able to scrounge up enough money to pay a half-time person to coordinate the parents.

These kinds of things make all the difference in the world: Just a few resources at the point of the school to reach out and bring them in and you have changed lives forever and the opportunities are tremendous.

If we take that and allow a child to progress through school, and follow through with what we did this time, in putting \$35 billion available for education beyond high school, we have changed this country forever, too, when we allow more and more young people to get a college education.

But we have to get them started on the right track, get them to read, get them stronger in math, give them that foundation, get the parents involved, let them understand they can dream the American dream and they can achieve it.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the other point that the gentleman made in his agenda, and again, his task force agenda, the Democratic task force agenda, was about efficient and coordinated use of resources. There was a very important point incorporated under that rubric which says, coordinate the services for children and families through local consortiums of education and social service providers.

What I find in my congressional district, and I am sure this is true in many parts of the country, is that many times the school districts are too small. If they want to provide certain types of services, or address certain educational needs, they need to get together with other local school districts. A small amount of Federal dollars would help a great deal in that, as well.

Just to give an idea, in my home county, Monmouth County, over the years they have tried to get the schools together on a county level to set up various schools that address particular needs. For example, we have a MAST program, M-A-S-T, which is the Marine Academy of Science and Technology. Students from the various county schools can enroll there. The county set it up at one location along the shore, actually, in my district, where they had basically marine and science programs for 4 years.

The students have to participate in like a naval training program, similar to the Navy officer reserves, but this is on a high school level. There is a physical element. I do not know if I would call it a military element, but there is

a physical element to it. But then they spend their time dealing with marine resources, specialty courses on oceanography and various aspects of marine resources. There are similar schools that have been set up on a county level for other purposes like that, whether it is sciences, or there is talk now with regard to arts programs.

I think the schools individually could not do that, but if they get together with some kind of consortium either through the county, the State or whatever, then they can set up something like that. Then again, that is the innovative idea. It is public. These are public school dollars that are being used to set up specialty type schools. I know this type of thing is a very important part of the gentleman's agenda, as well.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. The gentleman is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. What that does is open up for young people. We want them to be well-grounded in the basic foundation, but children learn a whole lot more earlier than we can have any idea, and have interests. That is how we get our astronauts, how we get our scientists.

With schools working together in consortia, or really outside the school, with various groups, there may be resources in the community they can pull in. Many schools are doing that in some areas, but they are doing it where they have substantial business interests who are putting the dollars in. But in some areas where those resources are lacking in terms of the tax base of the community or the school, and they do not have the business support because it is virtually nonexistent, then those children deserve the same opportunity. They deserve the same opportunity. They are just as talented.

I would venture to say if we take a sampling or checked every Member who serves in this United States Congress and in the Senate, we are going to find a lot of people serving in this body that came from Small Town, U.S.A. There are a lot of children today out in rural areas in Small Town, U.S.A., who can make major contributions if we give them that opportunity.

That is what the consortia is about, allow them to work together, because they do not have the money. They may not have the resources for all the Internet pieces they need. They may want to have a math high school. That is available in a lot of places and it works.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the other thing, too, when we talk about innovative programs like that where we get schools together on a county level or whatever to do something innovative, it is often difficult to get the local board of education to contribute dollars to something like that because they are locally based, and they figure it is taking it away, and so on. So that is a perfect example of where the Federal dollars become very attractive, and become a tool to provide excellence and to improve and provide more opportunities for public education.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. If the gentleman will continue to yield, Mr. Speaker, it is a lot like the farmer that seeded the ground and put some water on, because that local board, in many cases those dollars are allocated. It gets back to the issue you raised earlier as it relates to vouchers. It is not like taking new money. We are taking money away from the students who were out there, whether they be in the poorest community, the wealthiest suburban community, and the rural community. Ultimately, all children have less money, because you are funding a source that was not there before, because we have a lot of children who are not in the public schools.

That is their choice. I will say today that I will fight for their right to have that choice, but I will not support their right to take tax money and make that choice, because I do not think it is in the interests of all of our children. I do not think that is ever what was designed or intended when we talk about public education in this country. It is not taking public dollars and carrying it for private support.

Mr. PALLONE. The point is, we like to provide more alternatives, more choices, as the gentleman stated, but within the context of public education. We do not want the dollars taken away from public education. If we want to use the money to start some innovative programs at the existing schools, or to send kids in some sort of consortium, that is fine.

I know there have been a lot of experiments within, say, one school district, say it is a city and there are many elementary schools, in providing parents choices within the public school system. They can go to one school or another. But that is public dollars. That is still public education. There is a big difference between that and a voucher program that takes those dollars and uses it for private education.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Absolutely. I get a little frustrated at times, people talk about how schools have too much money, and some will say that. I do not know where they get that information.

I would say to them, anyone who feels schools have more money than they need, go talk to those PTA presidents, those PTA moms and dads who are out there selling candy and selling subscriptions to books and working at ball games in the evening, and taking the money from the concession and buying things schools need, that their children need.

That happens all across America. It is not restricted to urban areas, and not restricted to suburban areas, and it is certainly not restricted to rural areas. It is all across the country. Because that to me is the fact that parents want what is best for their children, and they are willing to go the extra mile to make sure that their children get that opportunity. When they do it and they spend those dollars and that time, it is not selfishly, for

just their child, it is for all those children in that public school.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to thank the gentleman again for his participation. I think this is what we have to do, exactly what the gentleman has done, which is to show how in various districts around the country efforts have been made to improve the public schools, whether it is basic skills or some of the other things we discussed tonight, and that is the direction in which this Congress and this House of Representatives should be going, clearly, not in the direction of taking the resources away for vouchers or other types of plans.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey. He is absolutely right, that this country is what it is today because we have been able to stand on the shoulders of those who have given so much for so long in our public schools, under some very tough situations.

I am very happy tonight to be part of showing some success stories. I hope we will be about that in this body on both sides of the aisle, talking about the successes of our teachers and children, because if we criticize our schools, we are criticizing our children and teachers. I hope I am never guilty of that. I thank the gentleman for helping organize this.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Pappas) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, the war on drugs is just that, a war. What I and a number of our colleagues will be talking about over the next 60 minutes or so is the war on drugs.

□ 1900

In my opinion, there are few issues that are facing the people of our country as important as that. And this dialogue that we are going to be having tonight is really a continuation of what has been going on around the country for many years now; unfortunately, many decades.

Mr. Speaker, each of us represents approximately 600,000 people in this House and unfortunately what had been a problem in maybe just certain urban settings 20, 30 years ago has now spread throughout suburbia and even into the rural areas of our country.

Each of us here took the oath of office to serve the people that elected us and the majority of the issues that we deal with seem to be about national defense, about our balanced budget plan, about providing for tax relief for the people of our country. Yet there is a generation that is growing up that is facing, in my opinion, a very uncertain future because of the drug culture that is so rampant throughout our communities.