

some future time in hopes that we can get agreement.

I want to point out there are a large number of amendments pending on this bill, many of which are agreed to, others that probably will fall by the wayside, it should not be that difficult to finish work on this bill. However, if we continue to have this delay, without any cooperation to move the process forward, then it is going to foul up our very crowded calendar. That is unfortunate, as we all want to get the legislation done, get the conference reports on appropriations bills passed, and other pending legislation which is essential, so that we do not have to shut the Government down. If we fail to get the cooperation of the minority in even agreeing to things that everybody agrees to, it is unfortunate.

Let me point out some of the Senators we would have helped today: Senator DEWINE, for instance, and Senator DODD; their amendments should have been agreed to. They have shown great leadership in advocating greater research into pediatric uses of new and existing drugs. Their amendment reflects Senator DEWINE's successful effort to marry the mandated approach in the administration's regulations with the incentive-based approach underlying Senator DEWINE and Senator DODD's provision. Senator MURRAY has worked diligently to protect the health and safety of children. Her amendment, which everybody agrees should be approved, modifies the national uniformity provision clarifying that the exemption requirement is applicable to the health and safety of children.

Other amendments by other Members that we could have adopted today will have to be done at some later time as long as the minority continues to block progress on the 152-page bill, of which 150 pages are agreed to. That does not make much sense. Why do we have this delay over a provision on which there is a disagreement, and general knowledge that the disagreement will have to be taken care of in the conference committee. The White House will insist that we come up with something different than is in the bill and the House has already taken a different position. Why should we delay the meeting of that conference committee?

I urge the minority to let us vote—they are holding up an extremely important piece of legislation. The only advantage in doing this is to raise more public attention to one issue—that the minority is willing to tie up the Senate over one sentence in this bill in full knowledge that further work will be done on the issue in conference.

So let's move this bill along, get it to conference. The House is moving expeditiously, so we can go to conference probably at the end of next week if we can get this bill done. I urge the minority to change the tactics of delaying any progress on this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, this Congress began its deliberations in a very interesting way. Our conference, our side of the aisle, met before the convening of the 105th Congress and concluded or defined 10 major issues they thought should be brought before the Nation.

The first issue, which resulted in the first piece of legislation for this Senate, for this Congress, was education. It was unanimous agreement in the conference that our first expression in this Congress on our side of the aisle would be about education and its importance. Not long after that the President of the United States announced that education would become a centerpiece of his activities during this Congress, and he actually visited Georgia, he visited various locales across the country, and he talked about, by and large, the requirement or need that people have some relief from the costs of higher education.

It is interesting, and in a sense in a bipartisan way, we had key leaders in both parties focusing on this issue. It is certainly exactly what ought to have happened. I believe the genesis of American glory is that we have been a free people. I have said more than once that an uneducated people cannot be free. An uneducated people cannot be free.

So as we, the custodians of this great democracy, prepare for a new century, we have to be asking ourselves the question over and over: Are we preparing the generation that will lead that century with the tools that they will need and require to be ready to do that job? Unfortunately, the news is not altogether comforting when you review the data.

Despite the intense interest in the last tax relief proposal on costs of higher education, that higher education is not where America is in trouble in its education. America is in trouble in its elementary and high school level.

I was reading just the other day a prominent survey of the condition in elementary schools. It is fairly alarming. It suggested that 4 out of 10 students in elementary school today are frightened by some aspect or fearful of violence in the school. Mr. President, the survey concluded that 3 out of 10 students in elementary school will have property stolen from them in the schools. It suggested that 1 out of 10 will be confronted with a deadly weapon while they are in school.

When you look at the condition of our reading proficiency, our basic skills—reading, writing, adding and subtracting—we are not comforted by the data which, of course, has led to this massive debate about skills that students have to achieve by the time they are in the fourth grade, have to

achieve by the time they are in the eighth grade, and how are we going to certify that it has happened.

I have spent the better part of the last 2 years talking about the fact that we have a drug epidemic in the United States, particularly among our younger teenagers. We have seen statistics that show that drug use has doubled in the last 36 to 40 months. These are schoolchildren, Mr. President. If you go to these schools—and I invite anybody to do it—the students are very savvy, they know exactly what is happening, and they know that there are drugs and violence surrounding their environment in school.

So, 4 in 10 are fearful; 3 in 10 are going to be robbed; 1 in 10 is going to face a weapon; and all of them will tell you the nature of drugs and the availability of drugs.

Three out of ten who come to college this September will have to take remedial training in reading. In other words, 30 percent-plus of the students that have gone through our elementary school system and our high school system are not ready for college and can't read well. So I guess the story is beginning to frame itself: We have a problem in K through high school. An American family ought to at least expect that when their child graduates from an American high school, they can do the ABC's, they can read, they can write, and they can do their arithmetic, and they are not behind. Society spends millions upon millions of dollars retraining these students by the time they get to college.

Well, I think this data and these statistics, Mr. President, are the reason that when you poll Americans, the vast majority of them now put education as the No. 1 issue. It is because they are reading the same data that we are reading. And, of course, it is the reason that leadership in both parties have come forward of late and have suggested that we need to make the Federal Government be the appropriate partner—the appropriate partner; not the governor, not the manager, but a good partner—in helping our States and our local communities get a handle on what is going wrong in public education at the elementary and high school level.

So, as a result, the first bill was introduced, S. 1, which contained three major initiatives. First, there was tax relief making employer-provided educational assistance tax free to help make up this shortfall, help these employers bring new educational opportunity to their employees. That is now law.

S. 1 allows State prepaid tuition plans to pay for both college tuition and room and board. That is now law.

S. 1, our first piece of legislation, made interest on student loans tax deductible. That is now law.

S. 1 provided education savings accounts for college. That is now law. That was a compromise and a coming together of the President's proposals and of our conference proposals.

S. 1 dealt with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act and made a commitment to full funding for the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act because, while passed originally in the 1970's with a promise that about half of the cost would be borne by the Federal Government, it was never done. Congress had reauthorized the act earlier this year. It attempted to modify it, to make it more flexible, more suitable for local school boards. And that is now law. Everything that we wanted to achieve in S. 1 was not, but much was.

There were key provisions in S. 1 for school safety. I alluded to this data just a moment ago—that you have 4 out of 10 that are fearful, 3 out of 10 that will be robbed, 1 out of 10 that confront a deadly weapon, and all of the students will tell you of the problems with drugs in and around their schools. This is not yet accomplished, this key provision of S. 1, and we plan to come back and address these issues as we move through this 105th Congress. As an example, we currently offered an amendment to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill that provides funding. Mr. President, for student hot lines to report acts of violence in school or for witness protection programs that would allow students additional protections if they would ever become a victim of a serious crime.

Now, Mr. President, in the course of the debate on tax relief, I introduced an amendment, cosponsored by many, that tried to make the tax relief proposal reflect more concern about the problems that we are having in elementary school and high school. As I said, if there is a criticism about the education components of the tax relief proposal, a constructive criticism, it is that it all focuses on higher education. But as I have just alluded to, Mr. President, the problem is not there. Yes, the problem of costs are associated with it, but it is an effective system, the envy of the world. Our elementary schools are not the envy of the world, and they are a source of great worry for us in the United States.

So we introduced in the Senate, in the debate on tax relief, a proposal that would empower parents to deal with education deficiencies, whatever they happen to be, for their children. We created and passed in the Senate, by a very powerful vote, 60 to 40, an education savings account for students, grades kindergarten through high school. It allowed parents to save up to \$2,000 per year per child in after-tax dollars, but the interest buildup would not be taxed if, at the time the account was used, it was used for an educational purpose for that child.

Mr. President, the savings account has a very unique feature to it. It allows sponsors to contribute to the account. So the parents can contribute to the account, obviously, but the grandparents could as well, or an aunt, an uncle, a neighbor, a friend, an employer, an organization, an associa-

tion—all of these could become partners to that family to help produce an account that that family could use on behalf of the child's education. Mr. President, this would result in billions of dollars over the next decade coming to the assistance of education where it really needs it—elementary and high school.

Mr. President, these new dollars, these billions of new dollars, I call the smart dollars. They are the most intelligent dollar investment that will occur in education. Why is that? Because they can be used for any education deficiency; whether the child needed a home computer or some other new technology, or the child might need a tutor because of a math deficiency, the child might need to be prepared for an SAT test, it might be necessary for an after-school program, or transportation, or uniforms, or whatever. But these dollars would be directed, like a bullet, right to whatever the problem was.

Now, vast public spending doesn't accomplish that. It sets up the broad parameters, but it has a difficult time getting to that child's specific deficiency. It may be medical, like dyslexia, or some other problem. But who knows best about those deficiencies? The parents. This arms those parents with an ability to go right to the problem, right on target.

So these billions of dollars would be the most intelligent invested dollars we could envision or imagine in education. Mr. President, these education savings accounts have created an enormous outpouring of support. There is some opposition, and I am going to deal with that in a minute. But the account could also be used for home schooling. The account could also be used for tuition, if the parents had decided that they needed to put that child in another learning environment, for whatever reason.

Mr. President, last week, we held a press conference here in Washington on behalf of two proposals that are part of our side's education initiatives. One was the proposal to provide funding for Washington, DC, public school scholarships, to allow students that are trapped in the most difficult schools an opportunity to have the resources, up to \$3,200 per student, to move to a school that was either safer or was producing a quality education.

The other proposal that the press conference gathered to support was the education savings account that I have just described. It was one of the most moving press conferences I have seen in Washington, Mr. President. The Presiding Officer and all of us have been to one press conference after another, and you can almost cite the routine. But this one broke the routine. I knew the Speaker would be there, and the majority leader from the House, and myself and Senator COATS from Indiana, a leading spokesman for education reform. We walked into the room and were joined by Alveda Celeste King, a

native of my home city; Congressman FLAKE of New York, an eloquent spokesperson who decided that he will resign from Congress and return to his ministry; a young woman named Starr Parker, who had written a book, "From Welfare Mother to Work." It tells the story of her life, freeing herself from the entrapment of dependency, and the independence she has gained by moving to regular work; a great spokesperson and a single mother of four from Cleveland, OH, giving an elongated story of her work to free her four children, who were in violent situations in public schools. They were in schools that were not teaching her children, and she told her story of freeing them from these schools and getting them to a new environment.

They were all there speaking on behalf of ideas like the education savings account and how important it would have been to them to help them deal with the particular problems that their children had faced and the entrapment that they were confronted with when no options were made available to them. The education savings account would have been a tool that they could have used to free themselves of these environments and get their children into the proper school environment that they sought.

It reminded me, Mr. President.

I see that we have been joined by our good colleague from Alaska, and I am going to turn to him in just a moment.

But my sister was a single mother of four with two sets of twins. I remember my father and I meeting many, many years ago and deciding that their education was going to be a major issue. We didn't have a lot to spare in those days. We opened up a savings account, and he and I both started contributing every month a little bit, and then a little bit more so there was a little nest egg available by the time these children were trying to deal with their college education.

If the education savings account had been in place, that nest egg would have been twice the size it was when it was ready for use because the interest would have built up, and it wouldn't have been taxed. We could have used those assets to help further and even do more than was done on behalf of their education. There is not a family in America—no matter whether their child is in school—that this concept wouldn't be applicable to, and no one knows more what the peculiar or particular deficiency is than the family.

So this is a powerful tool that will stand behind education wherever it is occurring—public schools or private schools or a home school or an employer environment.

Mr. President, I am going to turn to the Senator from Alaska, who has just joined us. He has been an eloquent spokesman in terms of our educational issues. I yield him up to 15 minutes, if that is appropriate.

Mr. MURKOWSKI addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, let me first commend my good friend from Georgia for his efforts to bring attention to the significance of the current education situation in the United States, and in particular, for emphasizing some of the shortcomings in our educational system and what we can do to change them. I am very pleased to join him in this effort.

Mr. President, I would like to talk about issues concerning education and the attitude of constituents with regard to what they see as insensitivity by the Federal Government. They look upon education as a responsibility that should be shared, with the primary concern resting with the parents, the educator, and then moving into the community as a whole and the school boards, as opposed to a centralized dictate from faceless and nameless bureaucrats in Washington, DC, dictating an educational system which suggests, "one size fits all".

When I go back to my State of Alaska, I consistently hear about the state of education—not only in my State but as it applies in our country today. I think it is fair to say that the American people are extremely concerned that, despite annually spending hundreds of billions of dollars at the Federal, State, and local level, our education system to a large degree is failing. The simple fact is that 78 percent—I am astounded at this—of all 2- and 4-year colleges offer remedial courses in math, reading, and writing; 78 percent. We would assume that our high school students have these skills when they get to the university. But that is not the case. Seventy-eight percent of all 2- and 4-year colleges now offer remedial courses in math, reading, and writing.

What does that suggest? It is pretty obvious that many high school students are being shortchanged in their academic preparations for adulthood.

Is that a responsibility of the parents, the educators, the school board, or the system? Well, I would have to say, it is pretty much the system.

As my friend from Georgia recently stated on this floor, the educational savings account offers relief. The recently enacted balanced budget bill contained nearly \$40 billion in tax incentives to help parents and students defray college education costs.

In addition, the new law provides individuals a \$2,000-per-year lifetime learning tax credit that can be used by an individual throughout his or her life, to enhance professional skills or complete graduate or undergraduate degrees.

I strongly support these tax incentives because in the globally competitive 21st century our Nation's economic success—our very future—will depend on a highly educated and high-skilled labor force.

It is so disturbing today as we look at some of the areas, particularly the

inner-city areas of this country, where, unfortunately, many young people come from homes in which they spent little time with either parent, and oftentimes with a relative trying to do the best he or she could in raising those children as a single parent. Some of these children are involved at a very young age in simply transporting narcotics, a trade made easier because law enforcement agencies might not initiate any significant sentencing on these young people. Some of them become addicted as teenagers and young adults and thus depart on this trail which leads to dire consequences. Others may be incarcerated from time to time as teenagers. The fact is when they are looking for a job, their skills are very limited. Many of them can't read and can't write. They have a very bleak future. Oftentimes that future leads to crime, drugs, and ultimately, a burden on society.

It is just not the inner-city areas where we have this exposure. We have it in other areas of the country also. Obviously, we need to alleviate this situation. To do so, we should assist families instead of offering a Federal solution which more often than not will not work.

So I go into this area to elaborate a little bit on the dilemma facing society today. Some of the solutions that have been proposed, and the tax incentive for higher education that was supported by the President along with the majority of Democrats and Republicans in Congress, do not contain restrictions that condition the incentives on students attending a public university. So families at the college level can take advantage of incentives whether the children attend State school or private universities.

But I think it is ironic that while the Congress and the President work so well together on promoting higher education incentives, the President, as we know, had threatened to veto the entire tax bill because a bipartisan group of Senators, including myself and the Senator from Georgia, sought to give parents with children in grades kindergarten through 12 basically similar tax choices.

Why is it that it is all right to provide incentives for attending private universities but similar incentives are deemed inappropriate while students are attending kindergarten through 12? The White House has not offered much of an explanation.

As important as a university education is this day and age, the best assurances that a child will do well in college, let alone be admitted to college, is the quality of education that student receives between the ages of approximately 5 through 18. When are study habits developed? When are reading, writing, and math skills developed? Everyone in this Chamber knows that children do not suddenly develop these disciplines when they enter college. The foundations for educational development begin at the early stages

of kindergarten, preschool, and evolve as the student moves up in grades through junior high and high school.

As we look at other societies, particularly Japan, I have often been struck by the commitment of parents. Many times the mother will study with the child. As a consequence, a family unit takes a significant interest in the learning process. When those youngsters who are in the Japanese system want to go on to school, they must take an exam. There is a great deal of family excitement around the test as the student studies for the exam and the family experiences a great deal of anticipation as to whether or not the child will pass the exam. But it is a system, if you will, that is supported by strong parental association.

Sixty Senators voted in June to allow parents to establish educational savings accounts, proceeds of which could be used to offset the cost of private schools or home schools in the K through 12 grades. This would have given parents of young children a very modest tax subsidy if they choose to send their children to private school. Contributions to such accounts would not have been tax deductible. The only benefit of these accounts would have been that earnings could be withdrawn tax free.

Although modest in scope, these accounts could have given real choices to low- and middle-income families who believe their children's best chance for the future lies in gaining an education in a private school.

Income limits ensure that the benefits of these educational savings incentives would have been focused on middle-income families. Wealthy families most often do not need to use these educational accounts because they can easily afford the cost of private K through 12 tuition and because the tax base in wealthy communities often provides the best possible public education in the Nation.

But middle- and low-income families don't have the same choices that the wealthy have when it comes to education because they don't have the adequate resources to pay private tuition. Allowing these families the choice of using funds from educational savings accounts for grades K through 12 would enable families with modest incomes to send their children to the schools where they believe that the child will get the best preparation for college.

What is wrong with that?

Mr. President, if the education savings accounts can be justified for college tuition, shouldn't they also be allowed for the educational expense that gives the child the opportunity to apply to college?

Mr. President, Congress and the President will again have the opportunity to debate this aspect of educational choice in front of the American public.

I am pleased to be a cosponsor with my good friend, Senator COVERDELL, who is with me on the floor today, of

his bill, PASS A+ Act—and I think that is an appropriate name, PASS A+ Act—which would allow parents to make contributions to education savings accounts that can be used to finance K through 12 education.

I hope we can pass this legislation before the end of the year. I hope that President Clinton will reconsider his opposition to helping families finance the cost of sending their children to the primary and secondary schools of their choice.

Mr. President, while I am a strong supporter of giving families a choice of where they send their children to school, I believe a vibrant and dynamic public school educational system is a strong bulwark of a free society, and I totally support it in this Nation.

That is why I supported an amendment to the Labor-HHS bill offered by Senator SLADE GORTON that will award all funds appropriated to the Department of Education for K through 12 programs directly to local school districts.

Let the local school districts bear the responsibility associated with the education process and let them be responsive to the parents of those children entrusted to the local boards of education for performance. That is the concept, the very basis of the accountability concept. It is pretty hard to hold nameless bureaucrats in Washington, DC, under a dictate one-size-fits-all. I think Senator GORTON's amendment puts the responsibility down at the local area, with the local school boards, by giving them, if you will, the necessary funding. His amendment I think reflects my fundamental belief that education policies and procedures are best determined by those who are the closest to the student. That means shifting decisionmaking to parents, teachers, and local school boards and away from Washington bureaucrats.

By simply block granting education dollars to local school boards, each of the thousands of communities in this country will have the flexibility to improve their education system at the local level, putting the responsibility on the people.

And by consolidating Federal education funds into a block grant we can assure that almost every school district will receive more funds for actual education rather than having the funds lost in a bureaucratic administration mire that exists here in Washington.

Under the Labor-HHS appropriations bill, more than \$11 billion would be distributed under the block grant approach. Currently, the costs of administering the programs that would be block granted represent nearly 15 percent of the \$11 billion. The block grant approach would free up the administrative dollars, meaning nearly \$1.5 billion more—\$1.5 billion more—could be used for students instead of filling out forms to be sent back to Washington, DC.

Mr. President, there are 788 Federal education programs that spend nearly

\$100 billion a year. How many of these are necessary? These programs are administered by 40 departments and agencies of the Federal Government. These agencies, I assure you, are not supportive of our proposal because they would not have anything to do.

Well, it is time to do a top-to-bottom review of how we could streamline the delivery of education dollars to local communities, and I think Senator GORTON's amendment is the first step. It is my hope the President will support this approach through educational funding that puts children and teachers ahead of bureaucrats and program managers in Washington.

So I think it is time for Washington to catch up with the American people on how to improve the educational opportunities of our children.

Mr. President, I wonder if I could defer and make a short introduction of a resolution that would follow as opposed to interrupting the presentation by my colleague.

Mr. COVERDELL. I will be glad to yield whatever time to deal with the resolution, and it is perfectly appropriate. The Senator is asking unanimous consent it follow this.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. I ask unanimous consent, Mr. President, the resolution follow the debate on education we are having here today.

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

(The remarks of Mr. MURKOWSKI pertaining to the submission of Senate Concurrent Resolution 53 are located in today's RECORD under "Submission of Concurrent and Senate Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COVERDELL). The Chair recognizes the Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, I thank the Chair. I rise to support the Coverdell bill, of which I am a cosponsor.

Mr. President, we have been debating several pieces of legislation on education here in this body over the last few weeks. It is important to clearly understand how all of this legislation fits together and why. This is about restoring the fundamental belief that education policy and curriculum belong at the local level; they are best determined by those closest to the students, who care most about the students, and who have the most to win or lose—the parents, the teachers, the local school boards, not Washington. As well-intentioned, as well-motivated, as the Department of Education is, as are the President and the Congress, who all care about education, it is those at the local level who understand it best.

The Gorton amendment, which has been referred to by my friend and colleague from Alaska, was passed last week during the debate on the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. This amendment block grants funds from several K-12 education programs in the Department of Education. It sends that money back to the States, back directly to school boards.

The Coverdell bill, another piece of the fundamental education philosophy debate in this body, is the Parent and Student Savings Account Plus Act. This legislation, as has been referred to many times this morning, allows parents to make up to a \$2,000 per year contribution in after-tax dollars to an education IRA, or you could refer to it as an expanded education savings account for primary and secondary education. Parents would be free to choose how this money and where this money would be used on behalf of their own children's education.

The Coverdell bill helps families, especially lower-income families, exercise the same rights as wealthy people when it comes to deciding where their children go to school.

Mr. President, I always start with this premise: Whose money is this? Whose money are we talking about? It is not my money. It is not the President's money. It is not the money of the Secretary of Education. It is the parents' money, the taxpayers' money. My goodness, should they not be empowered with some responsibility, since it is their money, as to how they use that, where they focus to help educate their children? I think so.

Our education problems begin not at the college or postsecondary level. Somehow we glide over that. Our problems in education begin at the beginning, at the elementary and secondary levels. This is where we must capture these young people. This is where they learn to read and write and discipline themselves and develop logic and work through problems—at the beginning. Not in college; it is too late. This is where we should focus. This is where the choice should be. This is where students and parents desperately need a choice in education.

We will probably soon have the opportunity to vote on a third education reform measure in this body, that being the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act, another fit, Mr. President, in the overall education debate, the overall education philosophy.

It is no great secret that the District of Columbia school system is deeply troubled. It is not the parents' fault. It is not the students' fault. But this bill that we will debate would create a tuition scholarship fund that would allow 2,000 low-income students in the District to attend public schools, private schools, or parochial schools, but schools of their parents' choice. It would also provide direct aid to an additional 2,000 public school students who want to improve their academic skills through afterschool tutoring.

As Alveda King recently wrote, "Is it moral to tax families, compel their children's attendance at schools and then give them no choice between teaching methods, religious or secular education, and other matters?" I do not think it is. "Is it consistent to proclaim, meanwhile, that America is a

Nation that prides itself on competition, consumer choice, freedom of religion, and parental responsibility," yet, in fact, we don't give our parents a choice where they send their children to school?

The Gorton amendment, the Coverdell bill and the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act are not an attempt to destroy public schools. My goodness. And that is an important point, Mr. President. I hear my colleagues on the other side of this debate saying, "Oh, you will destroy public schools. You will take funds from public schools." Nonsense. This Nation is a rich, great Nation because we have always had diversity. From the first days of the people who settled this Nation, it has been about diversity. People from all over the globe have made America great and continue to make America great. It is about diversity. It is about choice. It is about competition.

Americans should want their public schools to be the very best, to be the absolute best school systems that they can make, they can provide, they can develop. I have a daughter in a public school system in Virginia. It is a good school system. I am not standing in this Chamber today to do anything that would deteriorate, take away or harm the public school systems. But we must enable all people to choose the best education for their children, whatever their circumstances are in life. And we must restore the fundamental belief that education policy and curriculum are best determined by those closest to the students—parents, teachers, school boards—not Washington.

Mr. President, I strongly encourage my colleagues to support the Coverdell bill, and I yield my time. I thank the Chair.

Mr. GORTON addressed the Chair.

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

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, on Monday, millions of American children will board schoolbuses all across the country.

But when they get off those buses, will they be walking into schools that challenge them to learn and grow, or into empty shells of missed opportunities and lost hopes? Are we doing the best possible job of educating our children, or can we do better?

For decades, the conventional wisdom in our Nation's Capital has been that Washington, DC, knows what's best for our schools. I disagree. I think teachers, parents, principals, and school boards know what's best for our children.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate passed school reform to restore the traditional role that parents and teachers play in education.

The reform adopted by the Senate sends Federal education funds for kindergarten through high school directly to school districts.

Bypassing Federal and State bureaucracies, which siphon millions of

dollars and attach regulatory strings, means more authority and more money for local educators.

All of us want the best education possible for our kids. We all want them to succeed.

A good education unlocks the future, provides a lifetime key to open doors of opportunity and helps our children reach their dreams. We can provide that opportunity to our children by restoring the role that parents, teachers, and principals need to play in education.

Unfortunately, Washington, DC, takes a different view—the President and Democrats in Congress have denounced this proposal.

Education should not be a partisan issue, but when this school reform measure was approved by the Senate, not a single Democrat voted for it. And the President has said he will veto this reform when it comes to his desk.

Apparently, he prefers a system that has Washington, DC, deciding what's best for schoolchildren in Chehalis, WA; New York City, and every place in between. By taking this position, I think the President is telling parents and teachers: "I don't trust you."

While I believe the President has taken the wrong position, I know that he and I share the same goal—we both want what is best for our children. The debate is not over who cares more for our children's future—the debate is about how to achieve our shared goal of doing the best we can for children.

There is nothing more important than our children's future. There are few issues as troubling as the state of our educational system. The next century will demand a lot—advanced technology, the global marketplace, an ever-changing American society—and I am concerned that our children aren't going to be completely prepared for their upcoming challenges.

There was a time in America when parents and teachers had more say in their children's education. Over time, Washington, DC, gradually took responsibility for education from our home towns, and put it in the hands of Federal bureaucrats. What have we gotten for allowing Washington, DC, to run our local schools?

Since 1960, education spending has risen 200 percent, but SAT scores are down. Teachers used to make up two-thirds of the full-time school staff—now it is barely half. And schools are more dangerous than ever.

The Washington, DC-knows best approach to education has also taken us away from the "back to basics" approach long-favored by parents. Skim through your daughter's American history book. Does it instill her with hope? Is it the story of how incredibly diverse people came from all over the globe to pursue boundless opportunities? Or is it a visionless narrative of American failures and shortcomings?

Those who oppose this measure argue that it's somehow dangerous to entrust parents and teachers with more control

over our children's education. Those in Washington, DC guard their power jealously, and they won't give it up easily.

The President says this proposal will reduce funding for schools, and eliminates the Department of Education—it will not.

Under this proposal, local schools get more money, and the Department of Education plays a more modest role.

While fewer bureaucrats and a weakened Department of Education are valuable byproducts of this effort, they are not my primary concern—giving parents and teachers more control over their children's education is my single most important goal.

One Senator who opposes school reform said he actually thought that parents would build more swimming pools, instead of buying more books, if Washington, DC stops telling our schools how to educate our children.

I disagree. It's offensive to suggest that parents and teachers don't have the children's best interests in mind.

I believe that with the additional authority and funding schools would receive from this reform, our teachers, parents, principals, and school boards will be inspired to do even more—not to build swimming pools—they will be inspired to make sure that every child receives the best education possible.

It comes down to this—will local schools be improved through more rules from Washington, DC, or will they be improved if we restore the authority for education decisions that parents, teachers, and principals once had?

On this issue, I believe the answers are best left to our parents, teachers, and communities, not Washington, DC.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I commend the Senator for what he has done with the education issue. I am really excited about the prospect of having, in fact, more education funds available for my State but decisions made about those funds going to the States and local governments. I commend him for doing that.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the majority leader, after consultation with the Democratic leader, must turn to S. 25, the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill prior to the close of the 1st session of the 105th Congress, and Senator MCCAIN be immediately recognized to modify the bill, and it be in order for the majority leader to immediately offer an amendment relative to campaign finances. I further ask unanimous consent that it not be in order for any Senator to offer any legislation regarding campaign finances prior to the initiation of this agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DASCHLE. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the minority leader.