

completing his doctoral studies in English Literature at Johns Hopkins University, and Emily is a teacher. The first, the most profound, teacher we have is our mother. When we first enter this world, in a blaze of light and confusion, in such frightening contrast to our earlier serenity, it is mother who comforts us. It is mother who soothes our cries, who cradles us safely in her arms, and rocks us to sleep. This is the first, most precious gift of a caring mother.

I have no doubt that John and Emily will teach Laura the joy, the lifelong comfort, of the great books. The great, old man who raised me, my uncle, was truly the most remarkable man I have ever been privileged to know. He was just an old coal miner. He was not educated in this world's halls and universities. He was a wise man and a hard-working coal miner who played his part in life with a stoic and dignified determination to do his best for his small family, for his country, and for his God. He encouraged me to read, to learn, to develop my mind to the best of my own abilities. As another great man wrote, "The reading of all good books is like conversations with the finest men of past centuries."

Carl Sandburg once said that "a baby is God's opinion that life should go on." One of the greatest joys of our existence is to simply hold a newborn baby, especially if that baby is our own daughter, or son, or grandchild, or great grandchild—just to hold a newborn baby that possesses all of the freshness and the newness and the promise of life. We gaze in awe at this valiant little creature, so helpless, and yet so strong, as its tiny, perfect fingers grasp our own little finger with eager curiosity and awareness and pull that finger about.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink
Gleam half so heavenly sweet
As shine on life's untrodden brink
A baby's feet.—Algernon Swinburne.

In my experience, parenthood is a challenging balance of love and responsibility. It is a tapestry of the finest, and most delicate, weaving. We love and guide our children, and we try to always honor this awesome commitment. And we see a pageant of hellos and goodbyes. Children grow up. They go away to school. They go to work, marry, and have children of their own. And then, there are greetings to new and wonderful additions into our midst. For a grandparent, this tapestry, in the glow of a family's history, becomes more elaborate, more richly colored, and more easily observed. It has been one of the greatest delights of my own life, and in Erma's life, to witness this amazing procession of life following after life, seeing a new plateau rise, new plateau of immortality, a new taste. We wish Senator ROCKEFELLER and Sharon the same happiness that has been our experience.

Laura is the granddaughter of one Senator, and the great-granddaughter of another, our greatly admired former

colleague, Senator Charles Percy. In these fast paced times, more than ever, grandparents are an essential refuge of reflection and continuity between the generations. They are the living history of our shared past. In their reminiscences of earlier days, in their principles forged over a lifetime of experience and hard work, they offer a unique, valuable perspective of a complex and intricate world. I recall with considerable awe the birth of my great granddaughter, Carolyn Byrd Fatemi, born on March 4 of last year. March 4 in the old days was when the new Congress came into session, and a new President was sworn into office March 4. Now that day is the birthday of Erma and my great granddaughter, Carolyn Byrd Fatemi. It is a joyous, and humbling, realization to truly see oneself as part of that intricate tapestry of successive generations.

A new baby, so fragile, so tiny, so soft, so sweet, so delicate, and yet so determined to join this wonderful, maddening world, stirs our hearts and reminds us once more of our enduring link to the eternal. As William Wordsworth wrote,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Erma and I also congratulate Senator and Mrs. Rockefeller on the engagement of their daughter, Valerie, to Mr. James Douglas Carnegie. Perhaps the greatest transition in a person's life is when he makes that great leap from "I" to "We." It is the beginning of a journey with a beloved partner, who will share life's joys, and ease its inevitable burdens. My own treasured wife, Erma, and I have been on this wondrous journey for sixty-two years, and it will soon be 63, the Lord willing. To Valerie and James, I would wish the benediction of Milton, "Mutual love, the crown of all our bliss."

Senator ROCKEFELLER has worked tirelessly for the people of West Virginia for over thirty years. It has been my great privilege to work alongside him in this Chamber for the past fifteen years. He has been a tenacious champion of developing economic opportunities for West Virginia's workers, and a compassionate, determined voice for children, for senior citizens, for our nation's veterans, and for our retired coal miners. I could not wish for a more capable, diligent and congenial colleague. I offer Senator ROCKEFELLER my best wishes on these happy occasions for his family, and also my sincere gratitude to him for his intelligence, his strength of character, and his friendship.

Congratulations again, 100 times, on the birth of this beautiful little granddaughter. How proud he has to be.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I say to Senator BYRD, that was a most

enjoyable presentation. I am glad I was here to have an opportunity to hear it.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Although there is no unanimous consent, we have been moving back and forth on both sides. Under that scenario, Senator GRAMS is here and will make a presentation; Senator KERRY is the next speaker.

Mr. KERRY. If I may ask, Mr. President, how long does the Senator from Minnesota plan to speak?

Mr. GRAMS. Four or five minutes.

Mr. KERRY. I have no objection.

AFFORDABLE EDUCATION ACT OF 1999—Continued

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in support of S. 1134. I would like to make a couple of brief remarks as we consider this very important piece of legislation, the Affordable Education Act. This is a bill that would expand the right for parents to save money for their children's education without incurring a tax liability. Very simply, allowing parents to put some money aside to help their children's education, and do it without incurring tax liability, is a win-win situation.

The proposed new education savings account would allow families to contribute up to \$2,000 per year in a savings account for a variety of public or private education-related expenses. Current law allows parents to save up to \$500 per year for their children's college education without penalty. However, the expanded education savings accounts would allow parents to save more tax-free, and the money could also be used for children's kindergarten through 12th grade education expenses as well as college. These education savings accounts help working families, and deserve the support of this body.

I would like to provide a Minnesota perspective on this debate, because we can learn from what has happened in my home state with a similar education initiative. S. 1134 is similar to a tax break for working families instituted in Minnesota by former Governor Arne Carlson.

Governor Carlson and grassroots organizations in Minnesota fought for and won an education tax credit, enacted in 1997, which, like Mr. COVERDELL's bill, can be used by parents to offset the cost of certain expenses made in the education of K-12 students in public, private or home schools. Thanks to Governor Carlson's initiative, low and moderate income families in Minnesota can receive up to a \$1,000 per child tax credit for qualifying expenses such as tutoring, after-school or summer academic programs, music lessons, textbooks, and instructional materials—to allow the children these educational opportunities. Families with higher incomes are not eligible for the tax credit, but can still claim a tax deduction for similar education expenses.

When the legislation was proposed, various polls rated support for the tax credit and tax deduction package between 58 percent and 72 percent of the population of Minnesota. They supported this concept. Support for the tax credit and deduction has remained. In 1999, the law was expanded to raise the income threshold for eligibility for the tax credit to permit even more families to participate. The 1999 bill to expand the tax credit eligibility was passed with bipartisan support—in fact, you could even call it “tripartisan” support, since Governor Ventura signed it into law. About 150,000 families are expected to take advantage of the tax credit and deduction this year.

So in Minnesota, families have simultaneously been provided real tax relief and real opportunities to expand the education opportunities for children. And 3 years after the initiative was passed into law, the sky has not fallen in Minnesota, it is not a mortal wound to public education—in fact it helps students in public schools as well as private schools—and again, it became popular enough that the legislative subsequently expanded eligibility for the tax credit.

Today in the Senate, we have the opportunity to enact similar legislation that helps parents help save money to ensure that their children will get a quality education. Parents should always be in the driver's seat when it comes to education decisions, and this bill simply empowers them to do more to help their kids get ahead. S. 1134 deserves our support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, there has been a long discussion here. I do not know if I am the last in the course of the afternoon. If I am, I apologize profusely to those who are enduring until we are released, but I would like to share some thoughts regarding this bill, if I may. We are not sure what the status will be tomorrow morning with respect to debate or opportunity to comment on it.

I just heard the Senator from Minnesota say the sky is not falling in. It is not the end of public education for the small amount of experiments that have taken place in Minnesota. I am sure that is absolutely true, looking at the amount of money involved, maybe \$7 a year to a family using it for K-12, because once they have put whatever money aside they could in order to take advantage of K-12, the amount of interest buildup is not that great. So obviously we are not talking about the grandest sums of money. That is not what is really at stake.

In point of fact, the small amount of money is, in and of itself, an argument against doing what we are doing because it barely makes a difference to most of these families—though our colleagues who are advocating it argue

that whatever difference it makes, it is worth trying to make that difference. But that obscures what is really at stake here. It obscures the very significant, large issues about what the Senate ought to be doing, about what the real priorities of education in the country are, and about the inappropriateness of the underlying principle on which this bill is based.

So it does not matter how much money, whether it is \$10, \$20, \$30. It is a question of whether or not we are addressing the real concerns of education; whether or not this is what the Senate ought to be doing as its first act of speaking on the issue of education in the year 2000. It is astonishing to me that given the breadth of the education needs of the country, and given everybody's acceptance that education is perhaps the single most important issue to the Nation, here we are, when we could spend weeks on the critical issue of a broad-based approach to education, we have one little tidbit, one little piece of bait hanging out there as a statement of where our colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem to want to come from with respect to the larger issue of education itself.

What am I talking about? In the legislation, on page 5, where it talks about a qualified elementary and secondary education expense, it says specifically that this can go to anyone who is:

... an elementary or secondary school student at a public, private or religious school. . . .

This is an enormous transition for the United States of America because what we are talking about is a first-time extension of a significant tax approach to secondary and elementary school, private, and religious education. We have historically always drawn a critical line between higher education and secondary and elementary education. We do that for a lot of different reasons, not the least of which is that the Federal Government has never assumed fundamental responsibility as a national priority, if you will, for every person in America going on to higher education. Though we hope it, we want it, we encourage it, we have Pell grants, we have student loans, we have all kinds of ways in which we encourage people to do that, but we do not have the breadth of touch on the students because of the great breadth of educational opportunity that has grown up privately in the country.

That is not true in public education, which has been a commitment for secondary and elementary schoolchildren since this country's founding when Thomas Jefferson first talked about the pillars of education; since the days when we first made our commitment to a public education system that would help serve as the great melting pot/equalizer, if you will, by which we help to bind the country together as a country. That was going to happen, not through divisions of wealth but, rather,

through people knowing that by every child in America sharing in the opportunities of public education we would build that kind of country.

All of us understand the educational system we have today is not performing, in some places, in the way we desire. It is, I might add, performing an awful lot better in a lot more places than many people want to admit. The fact is, there are some stunningly capable, extraordinary public schools across this country. They are providing students for the best universities in the Nation.

What we need to talk about on the floor of the Senate is how we are going to empower every public school in the country to be able to replicate the best practices that take place at those other extraordinary public schools, or, I might add, at a private school, or at a religious school. But we do not fund it, and that is what this legislation seeks to do.

It is called the Affordable Education Act. I am not sure why it is called the Affordable Education Act because only those who can already afford to send their kids to a parochial or to a charter school or some other kind of school really are going to benefit from it. It is hardly going to be affordable to the families for whom the question of affordability is most important. It is certainly not going to be affordable even for those families who are already making savings because the amount of money they are allowed to put away hardly makes anything affordable. Finally, it really is not affordable because it applies to so few kids.

Ninety percent of the children in America go to school in public schools, and nothing in this act is going to alter that one iota. Ninety percent of the kids in America go to school in public schools. What we really ought to call this act is the Alternative to Public Education Act because that is really what it seeks to do. It seeks to establish a new principle by which we can come back each year and begin to build up the amount of money that some will fight for to put into savings accounts so that ultimately it will grow to a sufficient amount that, indeed, will become the alternative to public education for those who have the ability to make that choice or, for various reasons of abandonment of the public school system, are encouraged to do so as the only way to send their kids, in their judgment, somewhere that will make a difference.

What we ought to be talking about in this Chamber today—in fact, every day until we complete the task—is how we are going to guarantee that every school within the public school system has a fair opportunity to make of itself what schools in the richest communities make or schools which are the beneficiaries of remarkable endowments or parents in various parts of the country who have enormous sums of money and, in some cases, schools which are not necessarily dependent on

a significant amount of money but which have a core group of parents and students which allows them to behave in a way that is different from some schools in the inner cities or in rural areas where it is much tougher to build that kind of support.

The question the Senate ought to be debating is why we are not here as our first act trying to guarantee the real promise of America, which is to make certain that all of our children have an opportunity to go to schools that will make a difference in their lives on the positive side of the ledger.

We have been around this sometime before in the Senate, and it grows increasingly frustrating as we continually come back with these scatter-shot, little tidbit efforts. I know my colleague from Georgia does not view it as a tidbit. I know this is important to him personally. I know it is important to some colleagues on the other side of the aisle. But you cannot look me or anyone else in the eye and suggest this can pretend to be a comprehensive approach to the education needs of this country. If it is not, you cannot convince me that this is where we ought to begin the debate about what we are going to do to fix the schools in the country.

I have come to the floor and said this to my colleague from Georgia. I do not understand it. I know no one is going to accuse me of not being here long enough to understand it. I think I have a pretty good sense of how the politics of these issues work, and I still am frustrated and do not understand it because I do not think we are always that far off. Yet we continually keep talking past each other.

I heard the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. DOMENICI, argue that we ought to have a very significant increase in the amount of money we put into education. I am confident that when he was Governor, the Chair understood full well the difficulties of some of the urban centers of the State he represents on how hard it is, based on a low tax base, to provide for computers or provide for sports programs in the afternoons or for libraries that stay open or afterschool programs or remedial programs for kids who are having trouble learning. These things do cost money.

The fact is, there are communities in our country that do not have a tax base to go to. Yet we have an agrarian-based structure that suggests we still ought to have a school system working on those old hours as well as on the old funding mechanism.

Where does the money come from? The money comes from property taxes, except to the degree they get money from the State treasury in either some form of education reform or other disbursement. For too many communities, they have zero ability.

In our State, we had the same tax revolution everybody else in the country had. We had a limit on the amount property taxes can be increased—and

properly so, I might add. There are a lot of families on fixed incomes. There are a lot of senior citizens who have paid for their homes who do not have the income stream to support an increase in revenue. There are a lot of young families starting out who do not have the ability to find the extra cash-flow to pay for the property tax increase that might be necessary to adequately fund a really excellent school system.

What do we do? We merrily go down the road ourselves ignoring this fundamental reality.

I am with my colleagues on the other side of the fence. I do not want to throw money down a dark hole. I do not want to give money to a school system that is layered with politics, or has an inability to hold the teachers accountable, or does not have a structure that involves parents and has accountability of what kids are learning. I do not think anybody in the Senate wants to do that.

So I am having difficulty understanding why it is we cannot find a formula by which we are prepared to put some money into the system requiring those systems to embrace real reform, leaving up to those systems—and this is important—the determination of how they will get their kids to the end goal of a superlative education.

I do not think the Federal Government ought to run that. I do not think we ought to come trotting in with some new mandate and tell people, if you do not do this—that is not what this is about. We are only 7 percent of the budget of schools across this country.

Moreover, it is a steadfast principle that none of us wants to break that somehow the Federal Government ought to be involved in running the schools. We do not want that. I do not want that. I believe in local control, but local control has to mean also local empowerment, local capacity, local ability to do some of these things.

None of our colleagues can ignore the fact that if you are a young law student getting out of law school, one of the better law schools in the Nation, and you go to work in Boston or New York, you are going to start out now at \$140,000 with the top law firms. Right out of law school, you can earn as much as a Senator, which may not be an appropriate measurement of anything, but that is what we are valuing.

A teacher comes out of college with \$50,000 to \$100,000 of loans, which they are required to start paying back the minute they go to work. They are going to start at \$22,000, \$21,000, \$23,000, maybe work their way into the thirties after they have 15 years and a master's degree, and, depending on the school system, they can be at some school systems where they can get into the sixties, but with most of them they are in the forties after almost a career of service.

How do we turn to any student saddled with those loans in college and

say: Ignore all those dot coms where you can earn 60,000 bucks almost right out of school, ignore the opportunities of the marketplace where there is 4-percent unemployment and you have this extraordinary gap in all the technological fields where the greatest restraint on growth to our Nation is going to be the lack of an available skilled labor pool, and we are going to say to kids who are facing that kind of job market: Come teach and be a pauper; come teach, but forget the notion that you can share in that cape cottage or buy that extra car or have a longer vacation; you are going to just eke it out, you are going to just make it, but we expect you to raise your family the same way everybody else does and to live by the rules, and so forth and so on.

Are we crazy? We have lost all sense of proportion if we are not willing to try to recognize that if you are going to value teaching, you have to value teaching. That means valuing it by putting a fair market value on the people you want to have teach.

Does that mean that in exchange for that fair market value, you had better get your return? You bet it does. Does that mean accountability? Yes. Does that mean if you are not doing the job properly, you ought to be able to be fired? Yes. Does that mean you may have to work longer hours in return for that? Yes, it does.

I do not understand why we cannot come to some kind of an agreement that liberates every school system to go out and be the best it can be, and to let parents have choice, and have competition within the public school system. I am all for that. That is the best form of accountability there is in America—competition.

I have seen this happen. I have gone to many blue ribbon schools and have said: Why is this a blue ribbon school? What is it about this school that makes it a place where parents are clamoring to put their kids, but you go 10 blocks away and there is a school nobody wants to go to? You can very quickly pinpoint real, tangible reasons those differences exist.

Generally it begins with the principal. There is a great principal in every blue ribbon school I have visited. One of the great deficits in America today is our lack of capacity to attract, in some of the more complicated systems, the principals we really need in the context of modern education. Once again, that is a reflection of the money involved. It is a reflection of the school system, the structure, and other kinds of things.

But we ought to be on the floor of the Senate with a comprehensive approach as to how we attract young corporate chieftains, who are able to retire today with extraordinary wealth, to perhaps come in and be the principal of a school for a short period of time, lending their expertise. Ex-military officers, who retire after 20, 25 years, and are still young and have great talents in leadership, could help to manage.

I forget the name of the general out in Seattle who passed away a year and a half to 2 years ago who did an extraordinary job of doing just that. He became beloved in the school system because of the leadership skills he brought to the task.

We should have a national effort geared to try to attract people and pull them into these jobs. If we did that, we could begin to create energy in our schools where they competed with each other. As the parents say: I want to go over to the Driscoll school. I think what has happened over there at that Bartlett school is not working for my kid, but over at the other school all the parents are raving about the school system. The kids are doing better in their homework. They seem to have more discipline. All of a sudden, the schools are going to reverberate with parents making that kind of choice.

This isn't novel. There are a lot of places in the country where that is happening today. It is working. There are many other ways in which we could have a greater level of accountability in our school system. All of this underscores what the real debate ought to be.

I am also astonished that we are quick to come to the floor of the Senate to put more money into tougher sentencing. We will put people away for longer periods of time in jail. We will build more jails. We provided more assistance in the crime bill to do that. All of those things are important. But isn't it equally important to try to prevent some of those kids from falling into those kinds of troubled lives when it makes a difference?

We know, to an absolute certainty, that the time when most of these kids get into trouble is in the afternoon when they are out of school, unsupervised, and they go back to apartments or houses where there is no adult until 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening.

I believe it was almost 8 or 9 years ago that the Carnegie Foundation did an extensive study pinpointing most of the difficulties teenagers had in the afterschool hours—unwanted pregnancies, drug experimentation, trouble on the street corners. All of these things have occurred because they were not in school and because schools did not have the afterschool programs necessary to provide the value-oriented structure they need.

Ask any child psychologist in the United States of America, ask any penologist in the United States of America, and they will tell you children need structure. When you release kids at 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon to almost a half a day of no structure, you are inviting the kinds of problems we have invited in the last years. It would be much cheaper to invest in long-term education, afterschool programs, early childhood education, et cetera, than to build \$50,000- to \$75,000-a-year prison cells for the people we have allowed to slip through the cracks.

People say: Do we really allow them to slip through the cracks? Let me tell you, I have visited some schools where kids have dropped out. In America, it used to be that you had a truancy system. If you dropped out or you left your school for a couple of days, teachers actually cared about it. They said: Wait a minute. Johnny is not here today. Where is he? Somebody went after him to find out what was going on.

Today, in cities all across America, a kid may not show up for school, and nobody does anything about it. Parents do not even know the kid did not show up. There is no money for truant officers? There is no money to track anybody? There is no way to do that? What do you mean? We are the richest country on the face of this planet. We have created more wealth in the last 10 years than at any time in American history. We have 460-plus billionaires in America today. We have had a surplus now for the second year in a row. We are sitting around toying with whether or not we are going to give seven bucks a year to people who already have money so they can send their kid to a religious school or a private school. What are we doing?

This place is losing its relevancy to the real problems of America if we cannot start at the beginning. The beginning is this broad-based problem that exists with respect to education in America. It is rampant. We understand that. How can our colleagues not come to the floor and say: It really does make a difference whether a teacher is being asked to teach 35 kids, 40 kids, 30 kids, 28 kids, or 18 kids.

I have talked to first-grade teachers who tell me they have kids coming into the first grade today who cannot do the things kids used to do when they went to the first grade. They cannot do simple shapes. They cannot recognize colors. They cannot do early numbers. The teacher has to take that kid and somehow mainstream that child while managing the educational life of all the other kids in the classroom. I challenge any of my colleagues to do that for a day or two and see how they feel at the end of that effort. When you shortchange that teaching capacity, you are shortchanging every kid in the classroom. It has lasting impact.

I will give you another example. Not so long ago, I visited the Castle Square Early Child Development Center in Boston. There are 67 kids—infants and toddlers—who are in the Early Child Development Center. Of those 67 kids, I think 98 percent are the sons and daughters of single parents. That is a cycle we are trying to break. We do not want to pass that on to the next generation. The best way not to pass it on to the next generation is to guarantee kids have the kind of structure that makes a difference in their lives. But for the 67 kids who were in the early child development center, there were 550 on the waiting list. Maybe 5, maybe 10 of the 550 will be lucky enough to

cross the threshold of that child development center before they have to report for the first grade.

Under the law of the land, you are supposed to report for the first grade ready to learn. But as we are learning, too many of these kids come to the first grade and are not ready to learn. So we have built a deficit into the system before we even begin. Then we turn around and respond by saying: The roof is falling in on the public education system of America. What are we going to do about it? Well, we are going to give kids an opportunity to go somewhere else. Where? To a private school, to a parochial school, to a charter school?

Mr. President, there aren't enough places in private schools, in parochial schools or charter schools in this country to save a generation of American children. We can't build those schools fast enough. There aren't enough seats. So we can talk about that as an alternative all we want. It is no alternative.

The alternative is to fix the public school system where 90 percent of the kids in this country go to school. Again and again, I say it, 90 percent. If we had the most ambitious program my colleagues on the other side of the aisle could design to have a voucher or to create some alternative, we couldn't take care of 5 to 10 percent of America's children, let alone 90 percent. If we want to fill those high-tech jobs, if we want America to match the increased focus of Asia, Europe, Latin America, and other countries on education as their primary need with respect to the digital divide and the economies of the future, if we are going to do that, we have to pay attention to the educational opportunities afforded to our youngest children at the earliest stages of life. It is incomprehensible to me that we can't find the capacity to make certain that those 550 kids can all get the kind of early input they need so we can alleviate some of the crises in our school system by sending kids to school ready to learn.

All of this is part of a mosaic: early child education, early maternal input. Whether a mother is able to properly provide nutrition for a child affects a child's learning ability. All of these things do. It is very fashionable by many in the Senate to say that is the responsibility of parents. Yes, it is. It is the responsibility of parents. I agree. But what do you do when there aren't any parents? What do you do when there is only one parent who is working two to three jobs in order to make ends meet because that is also what we want them to do in America? They can't find the adequate child care. They don't have grandma and grandpa living in the house anymore. That is another change in America. People don't live that way anymore in the United States. So we don't have that great continuum that came down through generations that used to be the great teaching mechanism. But that is gone now. We have empty households.

So what do we do? We can talk about family. We can talk about values. We can also talk about the other great teachers. Religion is one of the other great teachers, absolutely. But without the parents, too many of these kids don't have that either. If they are dropping out of school, they don't have the other great teacher. So we have millions of kids, literally, around the United States of America who don't have any of the three great teachers in life. They don't have the family teacher, they don't have the organized religious teacher, and they don't have the teacher teacher in school because they are at risk in dropping out.

How do we fill the gap? We don't. We are debating whether or not to fill a nonexistent gap, to give some money to people who have already made a choice to send their kids to these schools. That is who most benefit by the legislation on the floor of the Senate. The people who benefit by this legislation are people who can save that kind of money. They are the people whose kids are probably already in a religious school or a private school. They are the kids who are already availing themselves of those benefits.

I am not saying to my colleague there is no value in providing relief for one of those parents. That is why we voted for tax relief. That is why we provide student loans. We do lots of things to provide that kind of relief. I am all for that. But let us get our priorities straight.

It seems to me the first obligation of the Senate is to come here embracing an overall concept. I might add to my colleague from Georgia, here we are being asked to spend \$1-plus billion, \$2 billion. It is as in a vacuum. I am being asked to give \$2 billion to parents whose kids may go to religious or private schools without even knowing that the rest of the budget is going to be for any of the other things I have talked about. Are they going to be cut? Are we going to have less money for after school? Are we going to have less money for chapter 1? How much money are we going to have in the School Lunch Program this year? How much money will we have for Head Start? If I have to cut those or can't have as much as we ought to have, would we then take this \$2 billion and put it elsewhere?

This is simply not timely. It is not appropriate. I hope it is not a statement of the full measure of priority of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. I hope it is not.

There are other colleagues waiting to speak. I have gone on longer than I had intended. I hope this year can be a year in which the Senate can find its way to a comprehensive, across-the-aisle dialog, to bring ourselves together in a spirit of compromise. So far the only compromise I have seen with respect to the so-called Straight A's plan and the approach of our friends has been on our side of the fence. It is my hope we can have that real dialog.

I look forward to it and thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I am going to try to confine my remarks to the proposal before the Senate. I will make a couple of comments regarding my good colleague from Massachusetts.

First of all, I say to him, this \$7 routine is exceedingly misleading. Two or three of his colleagues have used that. If \$7 is all we are talking about, then, A, why get worked up about it? And, B, if \$7 per year is the only advantage out of this account, which is four times what the President proposed, then I guess the President's proposal was only worth \$2.25.

Mr. KERRY. Will the Senator yield for an answer?

Mr. COVERDELL. Surely.

Mr. KERRY. I said in my comments that the amount of money is really not the key. I said I throw away the \$7 as not particularly moving. But the \$7 comes from the Joint Tax Committee estimate.

Mr. COVERDELL. I have seen that. But my point is, if that is the case, it is worth four times the President's proposal.

Mr. KERRY. I don't agree with everything President Clinton does or has done.

Mr. COVERDELL. I understand. I will read you another comment, the remarks as prepared for delivery by Vice President AL GORE to the Minnesota Community Technical College, where he says:

Here is my idea: We should create new 401(k) accounts like the 401(k) plans that help you save for retirement, but these accounts will allow employers and employees to contribute up to \$2,500 for each working person to pay for college or job training expenses, money that you can save and withdraw tax free. You could use this account for yourself, your spouse, even your child's college tuition.

That is identical to the proposal that is before us.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, may I respond?

Mr. COVERDELL. Sure.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, let me underscore that distinction to my friend. The Vice President, No. 1, laid out the most comprehensive plan set forward by anybody running for President of the United States. He set forward a plan that included \$115 million for a trust fund over 10 years. He set forward a plan to attract principals, to deal with teachers' pay, and with standards. It was a broad-based plan, and the section that the Senator from Georgia refers to does not apply to private secondary and elementary schools. It is college and job training.

Historically—and I drew this distinction—the Congress of the United States has always drawn a distinction between the higher education structure and the secondary and elementary structure. The problems I cited are precisely the reason why you need to have

a broad-based approach before you throw any piecemeal legislation out there.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, let me address that as well because the Senator has made much of this today, as have others. This is, of course, a piece of legislation from the Finance Committee. It has been vetted three times before the Senate. It has been passed by the Senate with 59 votes. It is cosponsored by ROBERT TORRICELLI of New Jersey and about 10 other Democrats. So it is bipartisan with broad support. It in no way suggests that there won't be a full debate occurring on the issue when the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act comes before us, which will be probably spring because there is not consensus on that committee. I am not on that committee, and I don't know if the Senator is or not. This comes from the Finance Committee and it is one component of what can be done. It is tax policy. It is characterized as if some little piece is going to somehow corrupt or become a hurdle in front of the broader discussion that will come with this other legislation. I find that pretty difficult to comprehend, particularly in light of the fact of previous Senate actions on the legislation.

I think it unfair to characterize this as a piece of legislation designed for private schools and that it somehow avoids public schools. That is just not so. The same sources of information the Senator has been quoting would have us understand that the education savings account will primarily benefit public schools but not just public schools. Seventy percent of the families who open these accounts—and I might point this out; the Senator covered it, too. He doesn't consider this the broad base and neither do I. But it does affect 14 million families and 20 million children, which is right at half—5 million less than half—of the entire population—seventy percent of those families' children are in public schools; 30 percent are in private schools. The division of the money is 50/50.

In other words, half the money that this generates flows to public schools and half to private or, I assume, home. That is not insignificant. That is about \$12 billion that we don't have to appropriate. It is voluntarily brought forward, involving those families with their children and their needs. It is not appropriate to characterize that as a program designed for private schools. Will parents who have children in private schools use it? Yes, they will probably tend to use it more, which is why half the money goes there. I think, though, in terms of causing someone to change schools, there is an implication there will be no place for them to go. It is not meant to make people change.

Mr. KERRY. I appreciate that my friend from Georgia is fairminded, and we always engage in good dialog. I appreciate that. First, we are sent here to

make choices about priorities for the country.

Mr. COVERDELL. Right.

Mr. KERRY. Now, when I see chapter 1 unfunded, or I see urban centers where they don't have computers, and I see so many kids in so many parts of the country whose families can't afford any of the amenities that make a difference, I find it very hard as a matter of choice to suggest that even that 50 percent is appropriately spent.

Now, I am not arguing with the Senator. I am not suggesting to him or saying that some family in public school may not benefit from this. I understand some public schools have uniform codes and a parent may be able to go buy a portion of the uniform. I don't know how much \$7 a year is going to do. If you are doing it K through 12, that is the interest. The only benefit under the Finance Committee rule is the tax benefit of the tax-free interest savings. So you can withdraw the money you have put into the savings account, but all you are really getting the benefit on is the tax-free component. Say you put \$500 in there and you have to draw it out in 2 years at 6 percent, or 5 percent, which is what they are earning nowadays—these things aren't even marketable; none of the major houses are marketing them, so you are going to earn base interest on it and you are not going to get much money as a consequence of that. So when you have very few resources, I say to the Senator, what is the justification?

Mr. COVERDELL. The Senator makes my point. There is so little invested on our part to cause them to do so much. I am stunned that people would be concerned. For this type of investment, why would we not want to produce the \$12 billion in new resources that we don't have to appropriate? People do it on their own—not to mention the connection that occurs between the parent and the student.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I say to my colleague—and he knows this full well—there are Members of the Senate who basically have been fighting for years to create sort of a full-fledged support system, through the Federal Government, for education and/or for schools outside the public school structure. That has been a great fight in the Senate.

What I said is it is not the \$7 that is critical here; it is the principle. If we adopt in the Senate a notion that we are going to now in the United States have a full-fledged support system for parochial schools and religious schools through the elementary and secondary level, that is new. Once we have made it \$7, you are going to come back—or someone is—and say we haven't given them enough; we have to give them \$500 because that is more meaningful. Of course, if we were willing to support either private or religious schools previously, what would stop us from giving them more money now? That is what this fight is about; it is not about

the \$7. Although, as a matter of choice, I don't see why it is we reward people who are already capable of sending their kids to these places and have made that choice versus the people who are having the hardest time making ends meet.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, 70 percent of all these funds go to families of middle income or lower income.

Mr. KERRY. As I have said, the real fight is the issue of this concept.

Mr. COVERDELL. I can accept it on those terms, but I don't believe the fact we have not taxed that account to be an appropriation of the U.S. Treasury in support of a private or parochial school. We have just not collected the tax; there has been no constitutional challenge or discussion about it. That just won't flow. If we have decided to grant accounts that people's own money goes into and have decided we are not going to tax the interest on it, there is no way in the world that anybody would find that that is a subsidy of parochial education.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, my friend knows full well that the famous teacher Stanley Surrey, I think at Harvard Law, coined the phrase "tax expenditure." We make choices in the Senate that if you forego a tax you expect to collect, it is an expenditure. Now, that is a well-known principle in terms of how we operate.

Mr. COVERDELL. It is also a fine line that does not in any way suggest we are making an appropriation. I accept the fact that you might argue, as Senator WELLSTONE did earlier, that it is money that wasn't sent to Washington and you prefer it be sent here so we can be involved with the distribution of it.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I believe my friend will acknowledge, as he has already—I think he said that a majority of this benefit will go to families in private schools.

Mr. COVERDELL. No, I didn't. I said that 70 percent of the families are in public schools. Then I said the distribution would be 50-50. The reason for that is parents who have children in the private schools are paying higher costs. They are paying, of course, the taxes for the public schools as well, and will probably have an incentive to save more. I think that is probably so. I sort of think that while 70 percent are in public schools, the distribution of 50-50 will probably be the case.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, if I may again just quickly say the Joint Tax Committee tells us that they arrive at an assessment where under the legislation of the Senator from Georgia, 52 percent of the tax benefit will go to taxpayers with children in private schools.

Mr. COVERDELL. If the Senator is drawing the line of the 2-percent difference and somehow that makes the point—

Mr. KERRY. Fifty percent.

Mr. COVERDELL. I will accept that argument.

Mr. KERRY. For the purposes of this, let us say it is 50 percent. I don't understand the public policy rationale for 50 percent of this benefit that we are going to grant going to private schools when 90 percent of America's children are in public schools, and of that 90 percent, the vast majority are poorer than those 52 percent who are going to get the benefit. It just doesn't make sense.

Mr. COVERDELL. It makes sense to the majority of the Senate, and I hope it will be so again.

In that we are now waiting for the Senator from Oregon, if I might close this out.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I thank my colleague for the dialog. It has been helpful. I always appreciate having it with him.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. COVERDELL. As I do.

Mr. President, this debate will continue tomorrow.

I want to reiterate that the tax savings account helps 14 million families and 20 million children. It provides for employer incentives to educate their employees. One million employees will benefit. It helps students who are in States with prepaid tuition plans because we do not tax them. That will be 1 million students who will benefit from the savings tuition provision. It adopts the proposal of Senator GRAHAM of Florida and Senator SESSIONS of Alabama on State tuition and on school construction.

Go across the face of education insofar as the Finance Committee is concerned. It deals with tax policy. We are not the education committee. We are making the Tax Code friendlier to States, communities, parents, employers, employees, and students to get a better education, 70 percent which will go to families of middle income of \$75,000 or less. It is the same means test the President used when he created the HOPE scholarship along with the Congress. The only thing we do is make it four times more powerful than the President's proposal.

As I said, I sort of reel from time to time when they try to make it insignificant, but then it becomes a huge debate. They contradict themselves. If this is only worth "\$7 a year" and is "insignificant," then the President's proposal is only worth \$2.25 because it is one-fourth the value of these accounts.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent there be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO MARIE FABRIZIO DICKINSON

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the distinguished