

this piece of legislation. I don't want to have a piece of legislation that has this great acronym "BEST" with all of the symbolic politics that purport to do so well for children and, in fact, do not. We shouldn't play symbolic politics with children's lives. We ought to be able to do well for kids and get the resources to the school districts, the resources to the States, the resources to the schools, the resources to the teachers, and the resources to the kids. At the minimum, we ought to do that.

That would be my commitment in this debate that is to come.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about our environment, and the right of all American families to clean air, clean water, and a clean future for generations to come.

Maintaining a clean and safe environment should not be a partisan issue. All of us live on the same planet. We all breathe the same air. We all drink the same water. When it comes to our global environment, we are one community.

In fact, when Americans voted last November, they voted for two Presidential candidates who both professed a strong commitment to our global environment. Former Vice President Gore obviously made environmental protection a top priority. But President Bush also made several promises to improve environmental conditions.

Unfortunately, as we celebrate Earth Day, Americans around the country are growing increasingly concerned that these environmental promises have not been kept. Instead, we have seen a series of actions that threaten to have significant and adverse effects on the quality of our air and water, and on the natural resources that our children and grandchildren will inherit.

First, President Bush reneged on a campaign promise to regulate carbon dioxide emissions. Then he caused an embarrassment abroad by announcing the United States' withdrawal from an international initiative to address global warming. He went on to block new protections against arsenic in our drinking water, even though scientists have clearly found that Americans face unacceptably high cancer risks from arsenic in drinking water under existing standards.

These actions are out of step, in my belief, with the American people. Certainly they are out of step with the people of New Jersey. Americans understand and reject the outdated no-

tion that we need to sacrifice the environment in the name of the economy.

Unfortunately, the attack on our environment continued in the President's budget, which would slash funding for EPA and natural resource programs by 15 percent over 10 years. This would significantly weaken our commitment to environmental protection in many ways.

Consider, for example, the President's request for funding for water infrastructure funding. The President is reducing the funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and wastewater loan program by \$450 million in this budget year. Yet more than 40 percent of our Nation's waters are not safe for fishing and swimming. In my own State of New Jersey, 85 percent of the water does not meet the quality standards of the Clean Water Act. I cannot and will not support a budget that will take us to even lower standards of protection.

I also am concerned about the administration's proposal to cut funding for clean air programs at the EPA. More than 100 million Americans today breathe air that does not meet the standards of the Clean Air Act. Yet President Bush's budget cuts EPA's clean air programs by 6 percent next year, from \$590 million to \$564 million. This could have a serious impact, especially for those more vulnerable to dirty air: the young, the old, and the infirm. Just this week we saw new scientific evidence of the carcinogenic impact of breathing soot in our air. I know it will have an impact in my State where the air quality in 9 of our cities and countries is among the worst in the Nation. We need to move against this.

While the cuts to programs like clean air and clean water may tend to get the most attention—and maybe they should—I am especially concerned about the cuts in the President's budget for EPA's enforcement operations—the so-called compassionate compliance. We can have lots of strong laws on the books to protect our environment, but if they're not enforced, they're worth little more than the paper they're written on. We in New Jersey have seen the consequences of underfunding enforcement. For example, our State reduced funding for our water pollution control enforcement program by 26 percent. I repeat, 85 percent of our waterways do not meet the clean water standards. That is a major reason why we continue to have such significant water quality problems in our State. We are not enforcing the rules that we have on the books. I hope we will not repeat this kind of mistake at the national level.

The President's budget also underfunds initiatives to conserve energy and to develop clean energy technologies. Overall, the budget cuts for the Department of Energy are \$700 million next year. This includes a \$103 million cut in renewable energy research and development, and a \$20 million cut

in energy conservation programs. These cuts come at a time when our Nation is once again confronted with the need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and to develop a comprehensive energy policy. An energy policy that addresses this challenge should have renewables and energy conservation as centerpieces. Instead, this budget puts them on the chopping block.

The President's budget also threatens our Nation's land and wildlife resources. It would weaken the protections of the Endangered Species Act, underfund land conservation initiatives, and generally weaken the Department of Interior's efforts to protect and preserve our Nation's great natural heritage, including our national parks. This will undermine numerous efforts by our States to fight the effects of sprawl and over-development, including the one spearheaded in my own State of New Jersey by our then-Governor, Christie Todd Whitman. She implemented a 100,000-acre open space initiative as Governor. I am concerned because in New Jersey the Sierra Club estimates that we are losing 10,000 acres of our dwindling open space a year. In New Jersey, these are real issues for us. We are the most densely populated State in the Nation.

The budget goes beyond cuts in some cases; for example, it eliminates the popular Wetlands Reserve Program. This is a voluntary program that creates incentives for farmers to manage their lands as wetlands. Finally, the budget proposes to drill the pristine Arctic Refuge in Alaska at the expense of rare species and fragile ecosystems.

Let me say that I would always prefer to give the President the benefit of the doubt. His actions, and the things he has to do, are difficult for everyone. But it is simply wrong to give big corporate interests such overwhelming influence in the development of environmental policies. The mining industry may do a lot of good, but it should not control policies over public lands. The oil and gas industries play important roles, but their short-term interests should not undermine the broader public interest in protecting our precious natural resources. We need a more balanced approach then we have been getting thus far in our discussion of the environment.

It is a great disappointment to me and many of my constituents given how important the environment is to each of them and their families. I have certainly heard that as I have traveled across New Jersey in the weeks leading up to Earth Day.

I hope we in the Congress will do what we can to help restore a balance to our Nation's environmental policy. I assure the people of New Jersey that I will continue to do all I can to resist efforts that would lead to dirtier water and dirtier air and erode our national heritage. The stakes are vital to our country and to my State. The American people deserve better.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### EDUCATION

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I want to take a brief moment to speak about one element of the education issue which as we move towards the debate on the education bill will be discussed at considerable length in this Chamber.

I want to lay out a predicate for this discussion. That involves the issue of what I call portability, or choice. Some have tried to place on it the nomenclature of vouchers, which really isn't accurate. But the issue is giving parents options in the educational system to assist them in ensuring that their children get an education which is of benefit to them and allows them to be competitive in our society.

I think we all understand that the core element of success in our society is quality education. We especially understand that in New Jersey where we don't have a natural resource to mine or agricultural products. We don't have some unique physical characteristic that gives us the ability to create income as a result of that characteristic. The essence of what gives our State its competitive advantage is the fact that we have a lot of people who are well-educated, intelligent, and are able to compete successfully in a very highly technical society.

That is a definition that can be applied to our country as we see a global market develop in all sorts of commodities. It becomes very clear that the theories of Adam Smith apply in our society and in our world today. There are certain products and certain capabilities which one society is better at than other societies. Fortunately, our society is best at those activities which produce the most wealth and the most prosperity. A large percentage of those products and capabilities involve technology. They involve intellectual capacity, and they require a strong education system to succeed.

Regrettably, what we have seen in our society today is an educational system that has not kept up with the needs of our Nation. In fact, tens of thousands—literally hundreds of thousands—of kids in our educational system simply aren't being educated at a level which makes them competitive in this high-technology world. It makes them capable of being successful, which means when they leave school they have the capacity to compete with their peers in English and math and basic science.

We have seen this regrettably for years and years. The situation hasn't improved a whole lot. In fact, we see in

study after study the conclusion that our school systems aren't working that well in many parts of our country; that we are well behind other nations which we are competitors with in the international community in the industrialized world. We rank close to last in math and science. It is especially true of kids who come to the table of education who have a natural disadvantage of coming from a low-income background. Those kids are even further behind than kids who do not have that disadvantage coming to the educational table. In fact, as I commented in this Chamber before, the average child in the fourth grade coming from a low-income background reads at two grade levels from his or her peers.

The same is true nationally. It is throughout the system. It is not just fourth grade. We have seen the dropout rate. We see the lack of capacity to be competitive academically on the low-income side, and especially the minority side in our urban areas is a staggering problem. It hasn't improved even though we have spent hundreds of billions of dollars in this country trying to improve the system. What can we do to change that?

We are bringing out an educational bill on the floor with amendments to address a number of areas, and it has some very unique and creative initiatives. The President made it his No. 1 priority. He brought forward the debate and I think moved the debate dramatically down the road or significantly down the road towards trying to get a different approach to this issue, recognizing that we have not been successful with the way things have been working for the last 20 or 30 years. He has suggested that we give schools more flexibility, but in exchange for flexibility for parents, teachers and principals in the school system require more accountability, and that we hold that accountability to be applied not only to the norm but to every individual group within the norm, whatever their ethnic, race, or income background. It is basically a testing program that requires kids maintain that level of proficiency in their grade level.

But what happens when you see a school system which continues to fail year in and year out? You may say: Who defines failure? The Federal Government? No. Failure is defined by the local school district or the State school board deciding what a child should know in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. It is not the Federal Government setting the standard. It is the local school boards.

But we know literally thousands of schools in this country year in and year out meet the standards when it comes to teachers teaching kids in those school districts and those school buildings—standards which are set up not by the Federal Government but are set up by the local school districts or by the States.

Literally thousands of schools are not cutting it this year. They have not

cut it for years in sequence. In some of our urban areas, 80 or 90 percent of the schools simply are not teaching the children in those school systems at a level that the local school district or the local school board or State school board defines as educational proficiency.

A parent who has to send their child to that school says to themselves: What am I to do? My child started in this school in the first grade and the school was failing. Now my child is in the fifth or sixth or seventh grade and the school is still failing. My child has passed through a system which simply wasn't teaching them what they were supposed to be taught, and everyone knew that child wasn't learning what they needed to learn.

What can the parent do under our present rules? The parent can do virtually nothing to try to help their child unless they happen to come from a reasonably high-income family. Then they can take the child out of school, or even a moderate-income family if they have a Catholic school system somewhere or a religious school system somewhere that has a low cost and have their child go to that school. But for most low-income families in our urban communities, their options are nonexistent. If you are the single mother with two or three kids, or even one child, and your child is trapped in that school system, you are saying to yourself: How is my child ever going to have the knowledge they need in order to be successful? How am I going to get my child to a point where they can read and do math, where they can step out of that school and get a good job, and where they aren't going to be assigned to a situation where they cannot compete in our society because they haven't been taught? That single mother's options are nonexistent today.

Some of us on our side of the aisle, and a few on the other side of the aisle, have suggested giving parents some options. Let's say to a parent whose child is locked in the school that has failed year in and year out—we are not talking about all parents. We are just talking about parents in low-income families, and single moms trying to make a living. They have a job. They are sending their kids to school. Their kids are in a school that doesn't work. Let's say to those parents that we have some other options. After 3 years in that school system that has failed, the parent will have an option to use the special money which the Federal Government sends to that school system to benefit low-income children, which obviously isn't doing any benefit.

You, the parent, will have the ability to take a proportion of that money and have it follow your child to another school, either a public school or a private school, where your child will have a chance to succeed. Your child will have a chance to participate in the American dream rather than to be locked out of it because they are in a school that does not work.