

their classrooms. We ought to help these dedicated professionals defray the costs associated with such classroom expenses.

I would like to see that bill broadened to allow all teachers to deduct the costs of professional development courses they undertake at their own expense. I know in the State of Maine we have many dedicated teachers who, at their own expense, pursue their education to make them even better teachers. I think we should help defray those expenses as well.

I look forward to working as a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, with the Presiding Officer, Senator JUDD GREGG who has been such a leader on this issue, our distinguished chairman, JIM JEFFORDS, and with many on both sides of the aisle who are committed to the goals and the challenges the President has set forth for us today. The President has challenged us to ensure that every child in America, no matter where she lives or the income level of her family, will have the very best public education possible. I intend to answer the President's challenge.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield any remaining time of my 5 minutes to Mr. GREGG, the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Maine for her courtesy. I also wish to thank the Senator from Illinois for his courtesy in allowing us to go in front of him even though he has been waiting.

I want to join in congratulations of the President for putting forward his education package and fulfilling a promise he made during the election, which was that education would be the President's first legislative initiative. As such, he has put together a package which has many very strong points which will significantly improve our educational system in this country. The package, as I would describe it, can be divided into four elements.

First, it focuses on children. It sees children as the fundamental element of our educational system, which seems only logical but regrettably has not been true over the last few years. In fact, over the past 20 years we have spent over \$127 billion on title I, but rather than spending it on children and having it be child focused, it has been institution focused or it has been bureaucracy focused. The President is shifting that title I money towards the child.

Second, the President is proposing much more flexibility to local school districts, to the teachers, to the principals, and, most importantly, flexibility to the parents because they are the folks on the front line who are most concerned about the child's education and who understand how best to do that.

The educational system changes from not only State to State, not only com-

munity to community but literally classroom to classroom. The needs within a classroom are different. The needs in one first grade classroom in the community are different from the needs in the first grade classroom in another town in New Hampshire. Flexibility is extremely important. That is a major element of their initiative.

Third, the President has focused on academic achievement. What an important goal. But it is, unfortunately, a goal we have forgotten. In fact, we have forgotten it in such a way that today our low-income children aren't achieving at all. As I mentioned yesterday on the floor, the average fourth grader from a low-income family is reading at a second-grade level, below his peers, even though we have spent literally billions of dollars focused on that low-income child. Academic achievement is critical.

He has pointed to the fact that the academic achievement of the child begins by having the child reach school ready to read. He has committed a huge amount of resources and a number of new programmatic initiatives to make sure that when our children get to school they are ready to read because, as he has pointed out, if you leave a child behind in the first grade, that child never catches up; they fall further behind.

The fourth element is one of the core elements of his proposal. He has talked about accountability. We are no longer going to send funds out to the communities without expecting results. We are no longer going to tolerate a system which leaves children behind, which says to children: We are simply going to shuffle you through the system; we are going to use the money for whatever happens to be the need for the day; but if it doesn't improve the results, we are not going to be held accountable. We will teach new math, and if you don't learn any math, that doesn't matter. If we teach you any methods of reading, and if you don't learn, that doesn't matter; you will shuffle through the system.

The President has said that from now on we are going to expect academic achievement and we are going to hold the systems accountable to results in academic achievement.

Those four goals are the right goals: Focusing the effort on the child, giving flexibility to the people who know how to educate so they can educate well, expecting academic achievement, and holding the school systems and the administrators accountable for academic achievement. I congratulate all those initiatives. This is a huge conceptual package with a lot of different initiatives performed in a variety of different ways.

I also hope we focus on moving down the educational road, the issue of special education, and the fact that we as a Republican Congress have committed our effort to try to fully fund special education. Certainly I hope that will be carried forward. I know this President is committed to that approach, also.

Nothing will free up local dollars more effectively and make more dollars genuinely available for good education than if the Federal Government pays its fair share of special education so the local tax dollars can be used where the local community thinks they can most effectively be used.

This package is a call to arms for an improvement in our educational system. It lays out specific guideposts of how to get there. I congratulate the President for putting it forward.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair recognizes the Senator from Illinois for up to 15 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. How much time is remaining on the other side of the 30 minutes they were allocated?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Eleven and one-half minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. It is my understanding I have been recognized for 15 minutes and at the conclusion of the 15 minutes the majority leader will be recognized; then I would like to ask that Senator BINGAMAN be recognized after the majority leader. I make that request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, Senator HUTCHISON follows the majority leader.

Following that, Senator BINGAMAN will be recognized.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I will yield to Senator BINGAMAN in the spirit of going back and forth, but I would like to ask that Senator CRAIG be able to follow Senator BINGAMAN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator amend his unanimous consent request?

Mr. DURBIN. I want to make sure I understand it. After I speak and the majority leaders speaks, Senator CRAIG would be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Senator BINGAMAN would be recognized, then Senator CRAIG.

Mr. DURBIN. After the time for majority leader, Senator HUTCHISON and Senator CRAIG would be within the 11 minutes allocated?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader's time is extra.

Mr. DURBIN. Understood.

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

NEW PRIORITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues for coming together on the floor this morning. All Members who were present on Saturday for the inauguration of the new President realize it was an exciting and historic moment for our Nation. The weather did not cooperate; it was pretty miserable outside. We all felt honored to be there, to see once again this unique part of American history where we transfer power peacefully, even when we have been fighting like cats and dogs between the political parties leading up to the election.

I wish the new President the very best, even from this side of the aisle. We are hopeful his leadership will be successful and that he will bring our Nation together as he has promised.

We on the Democratic side have tried to be cooperative. There was a brief moment which we affectionately refer to as the "age of enlightenment" where the Democrats were in charge of the Senate for about 17 days and then the leadership was transferred again on Saturday back to the Republican side.

The President has sent us 13 nominations for the Cabinet which, of course, is his effort to bring his team together as quickly as he can. On Saturday, immediately after the President was sworn in, we approved 7 of those 13. To put that in context, when last we had a Democratic President and a Democratic Congress, on the first day after the swearing in, only three members of the Cabinet were approved.

We are doing our very best on a bipartisan basis to give the President his team. There will be several other nominees for the Cabinet positions who will be considered this week. I assume most of them will be approved by the Senate. There are two or three who are controversial that may take a little longer. We are going to try to move, I am sure, in a reasonable manner to engage any floor debate and to reach a point where the President knows his team will be in place at some close date.

I am happy that President Bush has made education the first issue. I think that was the right choice, the right issue. Time and again when you ask Americans, rich and poor alike, what is the most important issue facing America, the answer is always education. I think it is because the term "education" embodies so many ideas and concepts which we value in America. Education means opportunity. Education means giving a person a chance to improve themselves. Education in our culture and economy means that a person of very humble origins can rise to a position where they can be successful in so many different ways. That is why education should be the first issue that we debate.

I am hoping, after listening to the description of the President's education package, there will be a lot of bipartisan agreement when it comes to education. Some of the concepts that have been mentioned this morning are certainly concepts I endorse. I think about my own home State of Illinois and the Chicago public school system. This is a public school system which only a few years ago was written off by the Secretary of Education, Bill Bennett, as the worst in America.

I daresay today what is happening in Chicago is exciting, and in terms of big city school districts, may be one of the most promising programs in the United States of America. The leadership of Mayor Richard Daley, the leadership of the President of the school board, Gary Chico, and the CEO of Chicago schools,

Paul Vallas, really took on a major challenge. In the Chicago public school system, 95 percent of the students are minority, 85 percent are below the poverty level. Imagine, if you will, that as your student enrollment.

Consider that you inherit a school system that is almost dead last in America in achievement. In a very short period of time, a few years, they have turned that system around, and they have come a long way by just addressing a few basic principles. The principles are fairly obvious to all of us as parents who have had children who have gone to school.

First is accountability at all levels so the administrators and principals are held responsible for bringing a team of teachers together, and the parents and students, in creating a successful learning environment; accountability for the teachers so they come to the class prepared and are good teachers; accountability for the students and their parents. All of these have come together. They have conceded that at times these experiments have failed.

There have been several occasions now when the Chicago public school system has announced a school has failed and they have basically taken the team of administrators and teachers, brought them in and said: You are finished. You had your chance. We are not going to leave kids in this classroom if they are not learning. This group is disbanded. We will start over. They didn't tear the school down. They didn't close the school. They said: We are going to bring a new group of teachers and administrators to give these kids a chance.

If I am the parent of a student in one of those classrooms, that is exactly what I want to see. It does me no good as a parent to know that the school system is doing well. If my child is not doing well, I have a responsibility as a parent to be part of that, too. So they bring the parents in to be part of this learning process.

So when I hear the question of accountability and President Bush's education package, I endorse it. I think it is a sound idea. It is one that we should include.

I might also say the idea of testing is one that I think is important. I hated tests as a student. Don't most? Most students would rather not take a test. A test is the only objective way in many respects to measure progress. It is not the only way. Some students may not test well but may be learning. We have to make that accommodation. But using testing to measure the progress of a student makes sense.

The big debate around here is whether we have national testing. That is voluntary now in the United States and will probably continue to be. I invite those school districts that believe they are doing the right thing to voluntarily sign up for those tests that Chicago has. We as a nation shouldn't take any comfort in the fact that some school districts are doing well and some not

so well. All those students are going to be our citizens and leaders of tomorrow. If they are not equipped and skilled, our Nation will suffer. When we have national testing to determine whether or not the students in Oregon and the students in Oregon, IL, are learning math and learning science, and learning what they need to succeed, I think it gives us a good idea as to whether our approach to education is succeeding as well.

We also, I hope, in the course of this bill, will address some fundamental changes in our vision of a schoolday. Why in the world do we start a schoolday at 8:30 in the morning and end it at 3 in the afternoon? There might have been a time when that made sense, but it doesn't today. The vast majority of kids have their parents working, so these kids get off school at 3 in the afternoon, in many cases without any adult supervision. Ask the police chief in your hometown what happens at 3:30 at the mall or at the shopping center. Ask the people who keep statistics at what period of time are teenage girls most likely to become pregnant. Don't be surprised; it is in that period between 3 o'clock and when the parents finally get home from work.

So when we talk about afterschool programs, it is to provide positive adult supervision so kids can continue their learning experience. It might not be the same learning experience as sitting in a classroom. Perhaps it will be music or art or sports or developing skills on computers. Perhaps it is just supervised time so they can do their homework. But I think afterschool programs should be part of modern America, to make sure parents can be confident their kids are using their time well.

The same thing with the summer school programs. Why do we still have 3 months off in the summer? It is hard to explain. There was a time when kids had to get out of school to go help on the farm. That isn't the big challenge today in most families. I think we ought to have summer school, enrichment programs and tutorial programs so kids can use that time as well.

So I think there are many things we can do in order to make our educational system better. I am glad the President has brought this issue to us. I believe he will find bipartisan support for many of his proposals on education.

There is one thing that was not mentioned on the other side in describing the President's plan, and I hope we can consider it. When the American Society of Civil Engineers assessed the infrastructure of America last year, the schools came in dead last. Our school buildings are old and crumbling. In many respects the schools are in worse shape than our water treatment systems and our sewage treatment systems in America. It suggests to me that school construction is an important part of a challenge to local property taxpayers in school districts and I hope we can include it in this debate.

The other issue that is going to be brought before us very quickly is the whole question of a tax cut. There is nothing more popular for a politician to suggest than: I am going to cut your taxes. Frankly, I believe there should be a tax cut in light of the enormous surpluses which our good economy, as well as the policies and programs of the last few years, is generating. We have created a system where, for the first time, we are paying down the national debt. That has not happened for 30 years. We are dealing with balanced budgets and paying down the debt. But make no mistake, we are still at this point in time dealing with a huge national debt.

I called this morning to the Department of the Treasury to ask them what is our current debt. They gave me the debt of America as of today. When you add that debt together here is what it comes to: \$5,728,195,796,181. That is the accumulated debt of America that we currently have to pay off.

How do we pay it off? We reduce it as long as we are running surpluses and don't spend them on something else. But each day in America we collect \$1 billion in taxes from wage earners, from families, from businesses, from farmers, and that money is used exclusively to pay interest on the old debt. It does not build a new school. It doesn't educate a child. It does not buy us any tanks or guns or planes. It is used to pay interest on old debt.

Many of us believe, in the discussion of what to do with the surplus, we should not lose sight of the most important single thing we can do, and that is eliminate this debt burden which we are passing on to the next generation. To celebrate a tax cut and ignore this, I think is to ignore the reality of what our children and grandchildren will face. I hope we can have a balanced approach with this surplus.

First be sensible. Don't assume, because some economists can think ahead 4 and 5 years, or even 10, and say, oh, you are going to have a surplus forever, that that is gospel truth. These economists tend to disagree all of the time. We have to be careful that we do not overestimate the projected surplus, be careful in how much money we think we will have. Then, once we have that money, we have to allocate at least a third of it to reducing the national debt so we do not have to collect all these taxes to pay interest on old debts which previous generations have incurred.

Second, we have to make sure we invest enough in Social Security and Medicare so that these systems will not go bankrupt. Mr. President, 40 million-plus Americans depend on these systems to sustain them, and Social Security payments, to make sure they have quality health care—seniors and disabled Americans. If we have a surplus lets make sure we invest from our surplus into Social Security and Medicare for that purpose.

Finally, of course, I support a tax cut. The Democrats and Republicans

both support tax cuts. My take on it may be a little different than that of some of my colleagues. I do not believe the tax cuts should go to the wealthiest people in America. I happen to think we ought to focus on struggling working families. I listen to the telephone calls coming into my office in Chicago and Springfield and Marion, IL. I can tell you right now with what families are struggling. They are struggling to pay heating bills. Families have seen a dramatic increase in their heating bills in the Midwest. They have seen a dramatic increase over the last several years in the costs of college education. They are facing ongoing increases in the costs of child care. Any working parent wants to leave that son or daughter in the hands of qualified people. Yet it becomes increasingly expensive for them to pay for day care.

I receive telephone calls and read letters where people say: Senator, I have reached a point where my family is doing well but my parent now is reaching a point where he—or she—needs more and more attention and care. We are glad to give it, but it is expensive. Can you help us with that?

When you are talking about long-term care, when you are talking about child care, when you are talking about the expenses to put someone through college or even the expenses of heating your home, the average working family is struggling to make ends meet. When we talk about a tax cut, let us focus on helping those families first. The wealthiest in America are doing OK. They will continue to do fine. They may have a tax cut but it should not be at the expense of working families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Mexico.

IMPROVING SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise first to speak about one of the critical pieces of education legislation that the Congress is scheduled to consider this year. I believe we have wide agreement, now, on the need to increase school accountability, with new systems that will put real teeth into improving school performance for all students, and school districts, and for each State.

I have spoken for several years, now, about the need to improve school accountability. I introduced school accountability legislation in 1999. Presi-

dent Bush has spoken frequently about it. His new Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, whom we confirmed on Saturday, has spoken about its importance.

I believe there is strong support from those colleagues, both Democrat and Republican, on the HELP committee. The provisions that we developed this last year to ensure accountability are included in S. 7, which Senator DASCHLE introduced yesterday.

In addition, I am introducing later today a bipartisan bill which contains those same accountability provisions. I am very pleased that my colleague and friend, Senator LUGAR from Indiana, has joined me as a cosponsor of that bill. This will be a bipartisan effort which will demonstrate the bipartisan nature of these proposals.

These accountability provisions demand results of all students so the existing achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, between poor and wealthier students, between limited English and English-speaking students, are eliminated and they are eliminated at the individual school level, at the school district level, and at the State level.

Mr. President, I do believe there is now widespread consensus on the need for rigorous school accountability in key areas that are addressed in this bill that Senator LUGAR and I are introducing.

The bill establishes aggressive performance objectives for all students that are linked to each school's standards and assessments. It directs resources to the students and objectives most in need. It provides for significant consequences for failure so that States and school districts must take full responsibility for turning around those schools that have chronically failed to adequately educate the students in the schools.

Our bill provides maximum flexibility for educators to develop strategies to meet the basic goals of school improvement, and it ensures that every class have a fully qualified teacher. The bill provides an expanded role for parents. Finally, the bill provides new funding for school improvement strategies that have been proven to work. These are strategies such as the Success for All Program, which Senator LUGAR and I strongly support.

I am very pleased that school accountability is finally getting the attention it deserves in Congress from both sides of the aisle. With widespread agreement now on the need for strong school accountability legislation—and sanctions for schools that do not live up to basic standards—I am very optimistic that this Congress can move quickly to develop a consensus package. I believe this bipartisan bill I referred to can serve as a starting point for working with the White House and with all colleagues on this vital area of meeting the needs of our schoolchildren.