

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF
THE CHAIR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. In my capacity as a Senator from South Carolina, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 1:17 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 1:26 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CRAIG).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

RECAPING THIS WEEK'S
LEGISLATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, there are several issues I wish to take this opportunity to comment on at the end of this week. First is the issue that has been discussed for the last 3 days and which we will be coming back to on Monday—the issue of education of young children in the District of Columbia.

With the leadership of the Mayor and working closely with the person who day in and day out observes firsthand what happens in the District, the head of the school board, and local officials, a proposal has been put together, generated at the local level, that we are currently talking about and debating before the Senate. That is the issue of allowing young children in school who are trapped—for the most part, impoverished children—in failing schools and giving them the opportunity to expand, grow, learn, and become educated, and thus giving them a shot at what we all know as the American dream.

Yesterday was a unique day in that on the floor of the Senate was Mayor Anthony Williams, who made a historic visit to the Senate floor at the invitation of Senator FEINSTEIN. From his presence here and in our many conversations with him, what is emphasized is how important this issue is to the District, to the future of this District, because it has to do with children and education. That is how important this issue of choice is, empowering the parents to have some sort of say in their children's education.

As Senator FEINSTEIN has so eloquently argued, the District of Columbia choice program is the Mayor's program. It is not our program—the Senate program or the House program, or the Federal Government program. It is the program of the District and for the District's children and families. It is what the leaders in the District of Columbia want.

We have spent almost 3 whole days on the bill, and we will spend, as I mentioned, Monday on it. Today, only one amendment has been offered. It is frustrating to me when we recognize the real problems that are in the District today in terms of education and we see

there is a response generated that makes sense and is locally supported, which has new Federal dollars, new additional dollars coming in to support the initiatives, it is frustrating that if there are 4, 5, 6—I don't know the number of people who oppose choice in education and parental involvement, but if they have amendments, we can debate them. Then we can vote on these amendments, and hopefully defeat them, because I am a great believer in DC choice but at least allow us to debate.

Avoiding offering amendments when time is being made available on the floor, in response to the great needs that we know exist, is frustrating and in some ways disappointing.

The only amendment that has passed, in fact, was by Senator FEINSTEIN, who is an advocate for this bill. So really there have been no amendments proposed from the other side. Yet, as we heard in the opening comments a few hours ago, the opposition insists that we cannot move this bill anytime soon.

I say that despite the positive impact that we know this bill can make on the District's schoolchildren. I am not exactly sure why there is this refusal to offer amendments and live with the outcome, when the time is made available and the issue is before us. I hope it is not national politics because we are talking about the District's schoolchildren. We are not talking about a partisan national debate.

Our goal is to give children today the very best education possible. So we need to debate it, we need to amend it, if necessary, and, if not, we need to move on, have a vote on it, and express the will of this Senate for the benefit of the kids.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has passed legislation that does offer this city's schoolchildren a genuine opportunity to achieve an education. It has been pointed out on the Senate floor, but it is important for me to again state it, that this is \$40 million of new money, that is additional money which, if this legislation passes, will come. If the legislation does not pass, that additional \$40 million is not going to go into education today. The money is to be divided between the supporting of public schools, of charter schools which are in the District, and then a new nonpublic opportunity scholarship program whereby over 2,000 students who are impoverished, who are trapped in failing schools by definition in the legislation, are given the opportunity to walk, with a check of \$7,500, to any nonpublic school in the District. If we pass the legislation, they have that opportunity. If we do not pass the legislation, they are not going to have that opportunity. It is as simple as that.

That is, again, why this is frustrating to me as majority leader and as one who is trying to schedule the Nation's business accordingly.

It is new money. It is not going to take resources from other education.

That used to be the argument: There is public education moneys and the money will be taken from public education and diverted to nonpublic education. That argument is bogus. It does not exist. This is new money that is coming into the system.

The record today in the District, in terms of educating children, has been painted pretty well, but in too many ways it ends up being almost statistics and coldhearted facts. But the coldhearted facts, I have to say, do tell the story. We spend about \$1,200 per student right now, per capita, per kid, in the District. In spite of that, the outcomes, the scores, are lower than any State in the country today. So the answer is not just money. We know that.

Only 10 percent, or 1 out of 10, of the District's fourth graders are proficient in math. Less than 12 percent of the District's fourth graders can write at grade level. Actually, it is fewer than 10 percent of the District's fourth graders are proficient at math, and right at 10 percent are proficient in reading. That means 90 percent are not proficient at reading. Only 6 percent, about 1 out of 20 or 1 out of 18, of District fourth graders can do math at a proficient level.

Words were used like "disgrace," which I think it is, and "scandal," not in the sense that there is misappropriation but a scandal in the fact that the outcome is so poor for these students and the disgrace is really in some ways ours for not responding and responding aggressively and appropriately. That is what we can do by passing this bill.

I should also add that I believe the dropout rate in the District is around 42 percent, and nationwide it is about 29 percent. So 42 percent do not go on to school. As I mentioned before, the ACTs and the SATs, which would allow one to go to college, are the lowest in the country as well. So kids who are graduating from public school are graduating with an inability to read, write, do math, and to add and subtract, really basic measures.

None of us in this Chamber would tolerate that sort of outcome for our own children, unable to complete simple fourth grade mathematics, or in the fourth grade an inability to write at grade level. Would we tolerate it? The answer is clearly, no.

It has been pointed out that many of the people who oppose school choice for children and parents in the District, in this body and in the House of Representatives as well, send their kids to private schools, and yet at the same time, when the opportunity is there, they do not give that same opportunity to other parents.

I mentioned Mayor Tony Williams, DC Board of Education president Peggy Cooper Cafritz, City Council member Kevin Chavous are all courageously advancing the cause of universal education for DC's kids. In addition to them are the parents of kids in the District. All across the city, parents line up in order to obtain better options for

their children. The need is so real and so intense that the District public school choice programs right now in the District are oversubscribed.

Each year, more than 1,000 schoolchildren are wait-listed for the city's magnet programs, those magnet programs which give those unique opportunities for parents to choose, with their kids, the type of program that best suits their individual needs—again, stressing the importance of parental involvement, of matching needs to sources. More than 1,000 children are wait-listed trying to get into those programs.

Right now the District has made more headway than my own State of Tennessee in the development of charter schools. About 15 percent of DC's kids are in charter schools. About 11,500 are in attendance in those charter schools. Once again, because they get that opportunity to better match resources to needs in an overall system that is failing and involves more choice, there is a waiting list of over 1,000 kids in the District for charter schools right now.

Indeed, in this \$40 million there is increased funding for charter schools which are part of the public education system in the District.

Thinking in terms of choice and opportunity scholarships, where individual kids have the opportunity to take resources that are already being spent on their behalf and allowing them to choose the school they could go to, taking that same principle, which is the principle behind, the fundamental power behind, DC choice, one need only to look at when John Walton and Ted Forstmann invested \$2 million in the children's scholarship fund in the District. What happened?

There were 1,000 seats and yet 10,000 kids applied for those 1,000 seats—again, to show the pent-up demand here for greater choice, greater opportunity to choose the type of school that best suits your needs.

On this particular issue, I just want to close and say I do stand with those parents, with those people on those waiting lists, because we have an opportunity to reverse that and to expand the opportunity for families to become involved and kids to have that choice. To me it is nonsensical for us to withhold from them that opportunity when it is within our power to do so, to support each child's right—and it is a basic right—to learn to read and to write and to add and subtract. Basic education for our schoolchildren simply just cannot wait.

ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT IN SUDAN

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I want to discuss an encouraging development that most Americans have had no reason, at least initially, to pay attention to. That is what has happened in a country on another continent, the country being Sudan.

This week, several days ago, we received word that the civil war that has raged there for 20 years and has claimed over 2 million lives, lives lost as a product of this civil war, a war that has caused over 5 million families to leave their homes, to be displaced from their homes and have to move to another part of the country—that civil war may be one step closer to ending.

On Tuesday evening the Sudanese rebels and the Khartoum Government reached an agreement on the position and size of their respective armed forces. A formal agreement, since that time, has been signed. This agreement includes three significant breakthroughs: A substantial withdrawal of government forces from the southern region of the country; redeployment of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the SPLA, forces in Khartoum, and third, the formation of an integrated force in the southern Blue Nile region and the Nuba Mountains.

What this typically means is that units are integrated to include troops from each side. That way, each side acts as a check, a check and a balance on each other.

Sudan's Vice President, Osman Ali, says the deal "has paved the way for a comprehensive peace agreement."

The Southern People's Liberation Army, SPLA, leader John Garang, concurs, saying, "With this agreement, the direction and orientation for peace in Sudan is irresponsible."

Clearly, while the agreement is key, there are still significant issues to be resolved. Many issues remain; for example, those regarding power and regarding the whole topic of wealth sharing. But the good news and the encouraging news, the news that brings joy to my heart, having spent so much time in the Sudan personally, is that both sides have looked at extending the cease-fire for 2 additional months, so they can keep talking and keep working toward peace.

A 2-month cease-fire, what does that mean? It means there will be less of the destructive killing, the bombing, the wars, and the battles that go on almost in a routine manner in that part of the world.

I was just in the Sudan about 4 weeks ago. I had the opportunity to work at the mission hospital there and become very intimately acquainted, again not as a Senator but as a doctor, with individuals who have suffered, directly or indirectly, from these war injuries. I go to the Sudan about once a year, plus or minus several months, where in the past I again have had the opportunity to treat people who have been hurt directly in the war, people who have lost their legs from the land mines which have been planted because of that war.

I mentioned part of the agreement applied to the Nuba Mountains. It is now about 4 years ago that I first took a trip to the Nuba Mountains. At that time the United Nations did not allow relief flights to go in that part of the world. The Nuba Mountains have been

neglected in many ways by the international community. I am pleased since we first went in about 4 years ago, the region has opened up to more relief and more transparency and much more of a spotlight, where the world can see the human tragedy that has gone on in that part of the world.

I also mentioned, as part of the agreement, the southern Blue Nile. About 2 years ago I had the opportunity to go to the Blue Nile region. I was in the Blue Nile region actually just a day after a very significant battle that had been fought in that region. It was just the night before. Again, I am delighted that is part of this formation of an integrated force, both in the southern Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains.

I have had the opportunity to go to Pabong, which is in the oil region, where people have been displaced several years ago. Although this whole wealth sharing is an issue that has to be addressed in the future, it is an issue about which I am very hopeful, now that progress is being made along the lines of increased peace in the Sudan.

Last month I was able to operate and perform surgery in a hospital called Lui Hospitala, a hospital sponsored by the Samaritan's Purse, a faith-based organization here in the United States. When I first started going to that hospital, it was just a schoolhouse. That was about 6 or 7 years ago, 1997. Osama bin Laden had just left, I think about 1996, from the Sudan. When we first went into the area of southern Sudan, it was just a schoolhouse there. The original hospital had land mines around it.

Since that point in time, over the last 6 or 7 years, the land mines have been removed from the old hospital grounds and now 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 patients are seen a year at that particular facility.

Through these experiences, I have had the opportunity of seeing first hand the shattering results of a brutal civil war. President Bush very early on, right after he began office as President, appointed Jack Danforth as a special envoy to that region—again showing the importance to the United States to establish, to promote, and to work for peace in that part of the world.

In the Senate we passed the Sudan Peace Act. We will continue to follow very closely the situation. We will continue to work with the administration, Jack Danforth and President Bush, to support the efforts of the Kenyan mediator, Lazarus Sumbeiywo, to encourage and support this encouraging undertaking.

It is the people of the Sudan—and that's who I spend most of the time with as part of this medical mission work in these clinics and in the treatment and in the doctor-patient relationship—it is the people of Sudan who long the most for the end of this violence.