

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. KENNEDY. If there is no one who wants to address the Senate, I suggest the absence of a quorum—I am sorry.

Mr. THOMAS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I want to use some of the time that is available for our side to talk a little about the bill. I have not said much in relation to this bill, but it certainly is one of the most important issues that we will talk about.

We have a great opportunity to help make education stronger in our country. That is, of course, what we ought to be seeking to do. This discussion has gone on for a very long time. I hope we are nearing the end of the debate. I think we have spent nearly 4 weeks, off and on, on this proposition. It is time to bring it to a close.

In my view, we have had an excessive amount of amendments; nevertheless, that is where we are. But now if we are really going to do our part, and if we are really going to be able to cause this to be something that is effective, then we need to focus a little bit, as we evaluate where we are, on what our goals are, what it is we are really seeking to do.

I guess too often I get the notion that we get wrapped up around here in all the details, little items that mean something to someone, and we lose track of where it is we really want to go.

What we ought to do is have a vision—hopefully, a fairly common vision—of what our goals are in terms of education, in terms of the role of the Federal Government in education, and to be able to measure what we are doing each day in terms of how we meet those goals.

I think one of them that is quite important is, what is the role of the Federal Government in education? It has been my view, and continues to be my view, that the major responsibility for elementary and secondary education lies at the local level, lies with the community, lies with the school boards, and lies with the States.

One of the reasons I think that is so important is there are very different needs in very different places because what you need in Chugwater, WY, is quite different than what you need in Pittsburgh, PA. They ought to be able to make those kinds of unique decisions locally.

What is really needed to bring about change? We are all in favor of change, although I am not as pessimistic about schools as many people are. I think most of our schools do a pretty good job. One of the reasons I think that—and I realize this is not a broad sampling—is because of the young people who come to the Senate. They are evidence, it seems to me, that our schools are doing a pretty darn good job.

We need to do better, and there are some schools that do better than others, but that ought to be part of our goal, to establish what is really needed to bring about change. Then we ought to measure it. I think too often when we get into these issues, much of our conversation begins to border on political rhetoric: Boy, if you are for education, then that's a great thing. But you have to kind of decide what it is that you are for. Everybody is for education.

We have to talk a little bit about spending. This bill authorizes spending far beyond anything that we have ever thought about. Obviously, most of us would agree dollars alone don't bring about quality education. You can't have it without the dollars, but dollars alone don't do that. So I think there has to be some limit.

With that, inevitably, goes a certain amount of direction and control from Washington. How much of that do you want? I think there are some things that we ought to think and talk about.

As I understand it, the real purpose, as we started out with this S. 1, was to increase accountability for student performance. We do that some by testing. There has to be some accountability. We have to put out there funding, funding that really works and is not wasted, is not used up in bureaucracies. We have to have increased flexibility and local control if we really want to be able to deal with the problems that exist in our school systems.

We need to empower parents to have a role in schools. We need there to be opportunities for students such as in charter schools. We need some changes in that respect. We need to provide options for students who are consistently failing or who are in danger at schools. We need to do something about that.

But the responsibility really lies at the local level. That is why we elect school boards. That is why we have legislatures. We need to help, but there needs to be local flexibility. I think it is pretty clear from the debate that the bureaucracy and redtape have been real problems.

My wife happens to be a special ed teacher. I can tell you, she spends more time with reports than is really necessary. When she ought to be working with the kids, she is having to fill out all these reports that come in and are required. There ought to be a limit to that.

We ought to try to reduce the duplicative educational programs that are out there. Now over 50 percent of the Federal education dollars are spent on bureaucracy and overhead. That is unacceptable. The money needs to be there to help the kids.

Burdensome regulations, unfunded mandates—talk to anybody who is an administrator at a school and see what they think about unfunded mandates and the burdens of regulation. We do not talk about that very much. We have had 150 amendments that bring about more regulations. We ought to make sure we avoid that.

I think, again, we have to work to give the States and the locals unprecedented flexibility. The Federal Government has provided only about 6 or 7 percent of the funding for elementary and secondary education. We ought to do better than that. But keep in mind, the basic thrust is in the local community with the local dollars, the local decisions, the local leaders. That is where it belongs.

We talk about schools failing. We ought to put a little responsibility on those who are responsible for those schools that are failing. Help them, yes, of course. But the idea that we are suddenly going to take over this whole educational system and change it, I don't think that is consistent with our notions of Government.

So I just think we have a great opportunity. I think there are some very good things in this bill. I hope that we conclude it soon so we can get it moving and so we can get on to some other issues as well. But I hope we evaluate, as we go: What do we think the role of the Federal Government is? How should money be used that is sent to the local and State governments? How do we have accountability? And how, indeed, do we make sure this effort of ours is one that produces the best dividends and moves us towards our vision of what education in this country ought to be.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, first, I thank the Senator from Massachusetts for his support of my amendment. I hope the Senate will overwhelmingly vote for and support the amendment that I have offered.

The Senator from Wyoming was just talking about the role of the Federal Government in education. I was just thinking about the many visits I have made to school districts around my State. I have been to about 160 or 170 school districts in my State. We have about 500 school districts. I talked about education in many of those visits.

Maybe other Senators have experienced the same thing, but when I talk about education in schools, when I talk about educational reform, superintendents and teachers tend to get a little stiff in front of me, tend to get a little tense, because they are living it. And here we are, on the outside, trying to tell them how to do it better. One of the reasons I go to those schools is to listen to the schoolteachers and to principals and superintendents, parents, and students.

One of the things I hear more and more from people and parents and teachers in particular is, yes, we need to improve education, but we also need to look at what is coming into the educational system, the children coming into our system, particularly in our lowest performing schools, where children are coming in with many more profound problems than they did 20, 30,