

six times the national average. Probably some Members of this Senate are in that statistic in Ward 3.

We have to ask ourselves, is it fair, given the factual indictment of the status quo of the D.C. public schools—which, as I said, over and over again today, we are spending a half a billion dollars and working with General Becton in all sorts of ways to fix it—is it fair for us to force the disenfranchised, not by reason of law, not by reason of the God-given potential of each and every one of their children, are we going to force them to go to schools that we ourselves, and in fact that statistics show that most D.C. public schoolteachers, will not risk sending their own children to?

I say to my colleagues, as you wrestle with that question, I want to leave you with the wisdom of a Nigerian proverb that I saw on the wall of a D.C. school that I visited recently. It said, "To not know is bad; to not want to know is worse." We can no longer profess not to know about what is happening to thousands of children in the D.C. public school system today who the superintendent of the school system says are in a school system that will not be what we want it to be for 5 or 10 years.

We cannot profess any longer not to know this reality. Therefore, for us not to act now, frankly, is not to want to know. And the terror of that is that for that willful ignorance, it is these children who are going to pay the price. So I have spoken strongly here today because I feel strongly about this.

Mr. President, this is about kids, this is about their future, this is about the reality of the American dream for those who have the hardest time of reaching for it. This is a small program—\$7 million—to try it out.

Hey, can anybody say that things are so good in the District of Columbia Public School System that it is not worth experimenting with an alternative for a couple of years? No. I hope my colleagues will think about this and will face the reality and will give this scholarship program a chance, which is to say, that they will give 4,000 children in the District of Columbia a chance that they will otherwise not have.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

Mr. COATS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. INHOFE). The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. I have three unanimous-consent requests the leader has requested. And I know the Senator from Minnesota has been very patient. And if I could just get these in I would appreciate it.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREE-
MENT—CONFERENCE REPORT TO
ACCOMPANY H.R. 2266

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 4:30 p.m. today, the Chair lay before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 2266, the Defense appropriations

bill. I further ask unanimous consent that the conference report be considered read and there be 60 minutes of debate on the report, divided as follows: Senator STEVENS for 10 minutes, Senator INOUE for 10 minutes, Senator MCCAIN for 10 minutes, Senator ROBERTS for 10 minutes, Senator COATS for 15 minutes, and Senator REED for 5 minutes. I also ask unanimous consent that following that debate, the Senate proceed to a vote on the adoption of the conference report with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREE-
MENT—EXECUTIVE NOMINATION

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that immediately following the vote on the DOD appropriations conference report, the Senate go into Executive Session and proceed to a vote on the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 165, the nomination of Katherine Hayden, to be U.S. District judge for the district of New Jersey. I further ask unanimous consent that immediately following that vote, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, any statements relating to the nomination appear at that point in the RECORD, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then return to legislative session.

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

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

MODIFICATION TO AMENDMENT NO. 1249

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, there has been either a printing error or technical omission in the current pending amendment—the line 22 on page 34 was omitted, as well as line 23. It simply is a section reference describing the language that follows in the section, plus the line "Notwithstanding any other provision of law." Everything else is as submitted. And it is a technical change to offset a printing error.

I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be modified to reflect this change.

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

The modification is as follows:

On page 34, strike lines 7 through 16, and insert in lieu:

SEC. 13. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This title shall be effective for the period beginning on the day after the date of enactment of this Act and ending on September 30, 2002.

SEC. 14. OFFSET.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law—

(1) the total amount of funds made available under this Act under the heading "FED-

ERAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE OPERATIONS OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL" to repay the accumulated general fund deficit shall be \$23,000,000; and

(2) \$7,000,000 of the funds made available under this Act under the heading "FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE OPERATIONS OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL" shall be used to carry out the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997."

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, the last item, which has already been approved, apparently has not been checked by staff. What was the last unanimous consent, if you would not mind? You already have gotten it approved, but out of courtesy. Apparently, the Democrats have not had a chance to look at it.

Mr. COATS. I thought it was cleared. It is a printing error, a descriptive—I tell you what. We will talk to them about it. If there is any problem, we will reset that.

Mr. WELLSTONE. That will be fine.

Mr. President, I first of all want to start out with some praise for my colleague, Senator COATS, from Indiana and for that matter, Senator LIEBERMAN. I think they speak with a great deal of conviction and eloquence on this matter. I think both of them are very committed to the idea of equal opportunity for every child in America. There is no question about that in my mind.

Mr. President, I too think that there has to be a way that we reinvigorate or renew our national vow of equal opportunity for every child. And I think that education is key to that.

But, Mr. President, let me just say at the beginning that there are a whole lot of things that we can and should be doing that we are not doing if we are serious about it. And that is sort of the context that I look at this proposal for the District of Columbia, which I will get to in a few minutes. But let me start out, if you will, with a kind of nationwide focus.

First of all, Mr. President, I have been traveling the country and I have been spending time in communities where people are struggling economically. I spent time with quite a few poor people around our country.

I am struck by the fact—and I have said this on the floor of the Senate before—that in all too many cases you walk into schools and the ceilings are caving in and the toilets do not work, the buildings are dilapidated, the lab facilities are not up to par, there are not enough textbooks. And with all due respect, quite frankly, until we make the investment in this area, just in infrastructure so schools are inviting places for children, we are not doing that much for kids. A voucher plan, be it a demonstration project in the District of Columbia for \$7 million or anything else is just a great leap sideways or backward.