

Now, I have no problem with choice. The President and Mrs. Clinton exercised the choice, and they pay privately out of their own pocket to send their kids to private school, and I think choice is great. Everyone, if they can afford it, if they have the money, they have the ability throughout this great land of ours to send their kids to private school or parochial school. But the difference is the use of public dollars, public money that could be used to improve the infrastructure of the schools, to pay for more teachers, to provide smaller classrooms, to teach and to improve basic skills. Those public dollars should not be taken away from the public schools and given to private schools to pay for private education for a very few.

In my opinion, vouchers will not help public schools; just the opposite, they will drain away resources that could be used to improve public school standards and rebuild crumbling or overcrowded schools.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership's latest experiment with vouchers will be rolled out this week right here in the District of Columbia. Their plan will be considered as part of the D.C. appropriations bill I think this Thursday. It will provide up to \$3,200 to 2,000 children in Washington to attend private schools.

This is about \$45 million in Federal funds that would be made available to pay for private education for about 3 percent of the District of Columbia students, 3 percent of the students.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion it makes no sense to take away \$45 million that could be made available to the city of Washington to improve basic schools or to fix deteriorated buildings in the public schools and use this money for private schools.

Now, we know because of the decrepit physical condition of many schools in the District of Columbia, the opening of the school year was postponed for 3 weeks. The voucher programs will take away money that could be used to fix these schools that were in fact closed. Why, so that 3 percent of the students can take advantage of the situation, and the other 97 percent who remain in the public schools will suffer?

With 9 out of 10 children in America attending public schools, Democrats understand that we need to rebuild and reform public schools, not to destroy them.

Today our House Democratic Task Force on Education is going to unveil a new Democratic agenda to improve public schools, and I am not going to get into all aspects of it, but I just wanted to mention some of the key elements again to the public schools.

First of all, the emphasis will be on academic excellence in the basics. Every student has to learn the basics, reading, writing, arithmetic. That is what it is all about if they are going to succeed later in life.

Second, we are talking about better training teachers to help children achieve high standards. We need to bet-

ter train our teachers if they are going to better train our students.

Third, we are talking about a major infrastructure program to basically improve the situation with the decrepit buildings in many of our communities around the country. We have overcrowding, we need new schools, we have schools in disrepair that need to be fixed up, we have schools that need to be improved so they can accommodate the new high technology age that can be wired for computers, so they can have students so they can be involved in the Internet, for example.

The other thing that we keep talking about is the fact that a small amount of money can be used on the Federal level to support local initiatives for strong neighborhood public schools. Democrats believe in the neighborhood school concept. We think the Federal dollars can help in that regard. Also we need to empower parents. We need to get parents more involved in the public schools so they can choose the best public schools for their children.

Again, choice is fine, choice within the public schools. Choice is also fine if people want to pay to send their kids to public schools. But let us use the public dollars to improve the public schools.

I want to say I believe very strongly, Mr. Speaker, that Americans overwhelmingly support the Democratic commitment to public schools, and they want to make our public schools safer, improve the quality of teachers, and get parents more involved in education. That is what the Democrats wanted. Fix the public schools, improve the public schools.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 10 a.m.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 10 a.m.

□ 1000

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Reverend Jay Scribner, First Baptist Church, Branson, MO, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray, please.

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the privilege of living in America. We are thankful for the many freedoms which we enjoy. Freedoms which were framed by our forefathers and perpetuated by our representative form of government in this great Republic.

I pray for these men and women who by virtue of their election, have assumed a very honorable position as a servant representative to the people of these United States. May the decisions

which they make today be made with wisdom from on high, with integrity from within, with justice and fairness for all people, and may it be obvious that even though they sit on both sides of the aisle, today they are one in purpose and intention to make right and wise decisions. May they be decisions that will reestablish righteousness as the foundation of morality for America, a pride in our heritage, love for our neighbor, and honor for our God and Saviour.

May the biblical Gospel be central to their public activism. May godliness be central to their personal attributes. And may God be central to their political action. All because righteousness exalts a nation.

We pray this in the name of Christ the Lord. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER. The question is on the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from New York [Mr. McNULTY] come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. McNULTY led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOME TO THE REVEREND JAY SCRIBNER

(Mr. BLUNT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. Speaker, it is a great honor to follow our guest chaplain Rev. Jay Scribner today. Reverend Scribner has been pastor of the First Baptist Church in Branson for the past 20 years. Branson has grown tremendously in the 20 years that Jay has been there. This town of 3,500 will host