It is a shameful circumstance and one that needs addressing. We need to get on to the business of this House.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 3584

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as a cosponsor from H.R. 3584.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF S. 1502, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STUDENT OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP ACT OF 1997

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 413 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 413

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider in the House the bill (S. 1502) entitled the ''District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997''. The bill shall be considered as read for amendment. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) two hours of debate on the bill equally divided and controlled by the Majority Leader or his designee and a Member opposed to the bill; and (2) one motion to commit.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, for purposes of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST) pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Committee on Rules met and granted a closed rule for S. 1502 which provides for 2 hours of debate equally divided between the majority leader or his designee and an opponent of the bill. The rule also provides for one motion to commit.

Mr. Speaker, let us make no mistake about it. The intent of this bill is to provide a better education for the children of Washington, D.C. The bill allows the most needy families of this city to choose what school is best for their child, and it provides them the resources to do it. In short, the bill empowers the families of Washington, D.C., who now have no choice but to send their child to an often inadequate local school.

At the same time, though, this bill will help the children who remain in the District's public school system. It provides Federal funding to help local public school students pay for private tutors. In addition, as some students begin to choose scholarships, spending per pupil in District public schools may go up, while class sizes go down.

Our intent is not to drain Federal funds from public schools. Instead, we are striving to help out accountability back into the public school system. A parent who notices that a neighbor's child has blossomed under the scholarship program will have the same opportunity for their child.

The scholarship funds in this bill are in addition to the more than $568 million that Congress provides every year to the District of Columbia public schools, a school system that spends more money per pupil than almost any other school system in the country, approximately $10,000 per pupil.

Mr. Speaker, the D.C. Student Scholarship Act helps the children of this city. I strongly support this legislation because I firmly believe that it enables parents to send their children to a more structured, more disciplined environment. It is their choice. At the same time, the bill allows the local public schools to focus on the children who remain and allows each school to spend more money for each child.

I urge my colleagues to support this rule and the underlying legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership just does not get it. We do not get better public schools by shifting public money to private and parochial schools; and that is, in the end, what the Republican leadership wants to do. They just want to start this grand social experiment in the District of Columbia and use the bill before us to do it.

Mr. Speaker, no one denies that there is a need for vast improvement in the schools of the District. But providing vouchers for 2,000 students just will not get it done.

And, Mr. Speaker, to make matters worse, this rule shuts out any debate on this matter. This closed rule prohibits the delegate from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) from offering an amendment to a bill that ostensibly affects only her constituents.

This rule is unconscionable and deserves to be defeated.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership will use words and phrases like school choice, accountability, object lesson to promote school vouchers. The Republican leadership will say that, first and foremost, school vouchers are about the children. Mr. Speaker, if that is, in fact, the case, why have not we seen legislation to provide schools districts with the funds they need to hire more teachers so that we can reduce class size and more readily promote structure and discipline in the classrooms across this country?

(Mr. CONYERS asked and was given permission to speak out of order for 1 minute.)

CIRCUMVENTION OF COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY'S JURISDICTION

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I have sent the Speaker, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NEWT GINGRICH) a letter that I want to put in the RECORD which deals with the fact that he has asked for a special committee to review any reports submitted by the independent counsel, Kenneth Starr. In my view, I say to him any such circumvention of the Committee on the Judiciary's historic duty would set a poor precedent and clearly indicate an intent to politicize this matter, rather than give it any sober and objective scrutiny.

Coming several months before the midterm elections, I believe the American public would also see the abandonment of regular order as signaling a partisan witch-hunt. This is especially important in light of the bias that you, you being the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGRICH), have demonstrated in your recent public comments.

The letter referred to is as follows:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC, April 29, 1998.

Hon. NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: During the course of the past several months, news reports have repeatedly quoted you and your office as contemplating the circumvention of the House Judiciary Committee and the formation of a special committee to review any report submitted by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 595(c).

In my view, any such circumvention of the Judiciary Committee's historic jurisdiction would set a poor precedent and clearly indicate an intent to intensely politicize this matter rather than give it any sober and objective scrutiny. Coming several months before the midterm elections, I believe the American public would also see the abandonment of regular order as signaling a partisan witch hunt. This is especially important in light of the clear bias you have demonstrated in your recent public comments concluding the existence of illegal conduct prior to your even reading or considering the report to the House.

In fact, if one looks closely at this matter, it is hard to see how one could contemplate any other venue than the House Judiciary Committee, which clearly has both the expertise and experience to handle any such report.

The Independent Counsel Statute itself (the Ethics in Government Act, 28 U.S.C. 591, *et seq.*) is the legislative product of the House Judiciary Committee. The Committee continues to be engaged in oversight of the Act, has conducted hearings on the Act, and shortly will be responsible for reauthorization of the Act.

Discussion of any underlying criminal statutes that may be contained in the report are under the jurisdiction of the Committee, and again, are subject to continuing scrutiny.

The House Judiciary Committee is the one Committee with the experience of handling grand jury materials, the secrecy of which both federal law and House precedents require.

As you know, I have repeatedly questioned Kenneth Starr both because of the tactics he employs and due to the numerous conflicts of interest that have beset his investigation from the start. If this matter is to be transferred to the House, it would be most unfortunate to taint any process from the outset