

This concept has been demonized. This concept has been vilified. This concept has been aggressively attacked, primarily by the liberal educational establishment in this country, essentially the leadership of the labor unions. Why is that? This concept of giving parents whose kids are stuck in failing schools—low-income parents, most of them single parents, most of them women—an option to do something to try to bring their kids out of that destitute situation, why has it been so attacked by the major labor union movement in this country which controls the teachers' unions? Primarily because it is the first step to what is known as competition.

Competition is an evil term when it comes to the liberal educational establishment in this country. I am not really sure why it is an evil term. If you go out to buy a car, you decide on buying that car because there is competition. Competition has produced the one car that does a better job of what you are interested in than what somebody else has built. You buy a Ford over a Chevrolet or a Chrysler over a Chevrolet or maybe a Chevrolet over a Chrysler because you decide they build a better product that meets your needs more appropriately.

Competition has been the essence of what has produced quality in the area of products in our country. They will say, this is not a Chevrolet; it is education. No, it is not a Chevrolet. This isn't cars. This is service. In the area of service you do exactly the same thing.

If you have a doctor who you think is not taking care of you or your family correctly, you go to another doctor. If you have a dentist who is not taking care of you correctly—maybe he drilled into your tooth and did not give you any novocaine which caused you a little pain—you go to another dentist.

For service providers, the same is true right across the board in our country. The only place where service isn't provided in a competitive way in our society with any significance, outside of pure Government is in public education. As a result, regrettably, when a child is locked in a failing school, the parent has no options. That is not fair. It is not fair to that child. It is especially not fair to the low-income parent in America. It is not fair to the urban poor in America that their children are the only children who are subjected to this lack of ability to have a chance at the American dream because we have a society which demands that they attend a school that fails year in and year out.

So we have suggested, let's give these parents and these kids a chance. Let's take a small percentage of the funds and allow the parent to use those funds to bootstrap that child into some other educational venue where they think they can do a better job, where the parent thinks they can do a better job. It can be a public school or it can be a private school.

This is an idea that has caused great disruption obviously in the educational

community. But let me point out it is working today with State and local dollars. It is working in the city of Milwaukee and in the State of Arizona. They allow the State tax dollars and the local tax dollars to follow the child to the educational venue, the educational place they wish to go. It works very well.

Listen to the mayor of Milwaukee, who happens to be a very active Democrat, and he proselytizes on this issue about how good it has been for the kids in the inner city, to give them a chance to be more successful, a chance to live the American dream. Remember, we are not proposing—and this is critical to understand—a unilateral Federal program that comes into the State, comes into the community, and says: You must allow the parent to have portability, to have those dollars follow the child.

What we are saying is this: We are going to put on the cafeteria line of Federal programs an idea. You, the local school district, you, the State, if you decide to, through your elected officials—and it is key to underline that; through your elected officials—can take off that cafeteria line the idea of portability, having the dollars follow the child. So it is going to be a program which is totally controlled by publicly elected officials. It will be only at the discretion of publicly elected officials who control the public educational system.

So if the public education system in Milwaukee wants to use the Wisconsin dollars and the Milwaukee dollars, and then wants to also use the Federal dollars, they can do that. But if the public education system in Chicago does not want to use Federal dollars or local dollars or State dollars in order to give parents the option, then it will not happen.

This is not a unilateral exercise. This is an exercise which is related to the local community making the decision, through its locally elected officials, who control local education. So it is not some huge scheme that is going to be settled on the community from above.

Why shouldn't we say to the city of Milwaukee: All right, you have a program that you think is working very well. You are taking your State tax dollars, you are taking your local property tax dollars, and you have set up a program where those dollars follow the child. But, unfortunately, you, Milwaukee, today, under our law today, cannot take Federal dollars and follow the child. Your Federal dollars have to go to the public school system. They have to go to the public schools, and it is not in relation to how many low-income kids there are in the schools—and there can be some low-income kids who do not get any dollars for education—but, rather, it is in relationship to some arbitrary formula settled back in 1976 that simply happens to be a formula based on political expediency today.

Why shouldn't we say to Milwaukee: We are not going to do that any longer, Milwaukee. You have made a decision as to how you think you can educate your children. We are going to let the Federal dollars follow the local and State dollars. Specifically, in Milwaukee, if you decide to do it, we are going to allow you to use these dollars with portability, so the parents can have options; the same with Arizona.

That is what we are proposing. It is really not radical at all. It is not a Federal initiative demanding we have a national program on "vouchers," a word that has been made a pejorative term. It is a program that suggests that local communities and States may decide that parents, who have their kids in failing schools, where those schools have failed year in and year out, can do something for their children that will create some competition in the educational market, something which is fundamental to the American society in producing quality. It is a program that suggests that those school districts which have made those decisions locally or statewide, through their elected leaders, will have the option, with our Federal dollars, to do the same.

That idea has retained huge resistance; the resistance isn't rational. The resistance is political. It is driven by a desire basically not to allow competition, not to allow creativity in our local school districts, but to drive the process of education from Washington, so that an elite few can decide for many how education is pursued nationally.

We are going to discuss this at greater length as we move down the road on the education bill. But I thought it would be appropriate at this time to at least lay down the foundation for the predicate of the debate because it is grossly misrepresented in the press, not because the press does not understand the issue but because the presenters to the press maybe want to misrepresent. I believe it is appropriate to maybe begin to make clear for the record what is being proposed.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair, in his capacity as the Senator from Wyoming, asks unanimous consent the calling of the quorum call be rescinded.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now stand in recess until the hour of 2:15.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m. recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer [Mr. INHOFE].

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.