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Senate

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. CARPER. I thank the Senator from Louisiana for yielding. Before I was elected, I served as Governor of Delaware for 8 years, following Mike Castle, who launched near the end of his second term education reform. What we began in his last term and I tried to do in the 8 years I was privileged to serve as Governor was to focus more on raising student achievement than on anything else. We were willing to experiment rather boldly to try to accomplish that. We established rigorous academic standards, not standards in math, science, English, and social studies that the politicians thought were important, but we gathered the best teachers in the State, the best scientists, to develop academic standards of what we expected kids to know at different grade levels in their academic careers.

We wanted to test students objectively, measure whether they were making academic progress to the standards. We wanted to be objective.

And, finally, we wanted to make sure we held everyone accountable--students, schools, school districts, even the educators. Trying to hold parents accountable would be the hardest part of all.

During the course of those reforms, we sought to identify what was working to raise student achievement. Did smaller class sizes work? If so, the idea was to replicate that and do that in other schools. We eventually found that smaller class sizes in kindergarten and classes for age 7 had the most impact.

We learned investment in early childhood paid huge dividends and concluded that in the first 6 years of our life, by the time we are age 6 and in first grade, we have learned about half of what we are going to learn in our lives. If we waste the first 6 years, it is hard to catch up later on.

We learned that if we can harness technology, we can help equalize the playing field for a whole lot of kids. We learned that it is not just enough

to hook up classrooms to the Internet. It is not enough to have even decent computers. If you do not have teachers comfortable in using the technology to bring the outside world into the classroom and making the learning come alive and using it effectively as a tool, the money for all the wiring and the computers is money that is not well spent. Teachers have the professional development and the familiarity of using this technology lining up with the curriculum, the lesson plan, and making the learning come alive.

We learned in the course of our experiments in Delaware that all kids can learn. Some learn more quickly than others. Mary might learn faster than Tom, but Tom could learn. He just might need extra time or be taught in different ways. We learned maybe longer school days are helpful for doing that, afterschool programs, and maybe summer schools. We have schools, for example, for kids who are entering ninth grade. We can bring those kids in for a month or so in the summer before they go into ninth grade, put them in a summer academy, and they have a better chance of helping the kids to meet the standards they need in ninth grade.

We did all this in an effort to try to learn what worked to raise student achievement. We did so because we wanted to be able to invest the limited dollars that we had in programs that would raise student achievement. Of all the things we did in my State during the time that I served as its Governor, preparing the workforce for the 21st century was most important. If we are going to be successful as a nation, it will be

because we prepare and create a workforce that is able to beat any workforce in the world.

What does that have to do with what we are talking about? The schools in the District of Columbia are not doing the job for many of the kids who live there. The public schools in this District are not doing the job for many of the kids who live there. And a good deal is being done to try to turn that around. This District has begun to experiment rather boldly with charter schools, some of the things I talked about earlier--extra learning time, technology, and professional development--in order to raise student achievement. They have a long way to go.

As we dealt with the issue and tackled the issue of leaving no child behind in a failing school, we did not say that the Federal Government would go out there and establish academic standards. We said, we will let the States establish their own academic standards. Let them figure it out and know what they should be doing. We said the same thing about the District of Columbia. They develop their academic standards in the District of Columbia. We do not do that.

No Child Left Behind also says we expect kids to make progress every year. We expect all kids can learn, and over a period of a decade or so we expect virtually all children to be able to reach the academic standards, whether it is the District of Columbia, Delaware, Ohio, Louisiana, or Alabama. Of the public schools in the District of Columbia, or Minnesota or Delaware, under No

Child Left Behind, if a school does not meet adequate yearly progress for 1 year, that school is essentially put on notice that they are deficient.

If they continue to not meet the adequate yearly progress for a second or a third year, there are consequences for the failure to do so. By the fourth year, if a public school--4 years in a row, in any of our States or in the District of Columbia--fails to meet adequate yearly progress, there are consequences that can be rather severe. The school can be closed and restructured, the faculty changed, leadership changed. The school can be transformed into a charter school. Public school choice can be demanded, required, including the funding of transportation to other public schools. But the consequences are severe.

If a charter school in Minnesota, where I think charter schools may have originated, or in any of the other States that are represented here is deficient, and the students there--for 1 year or 2 years or 3 years or 4 years--do not demonstrate adequate yearly progress, or those schools do not show progress year after year, then there are consequences as well. There is also help. We try to provide extra help: extra money, tutorial assistance, that kind of thing. But in the end, if there is not progress, we do not want to continue to throw good money after bad.

I want to talk about an area we got hung up on, and it is a little complicated; but I want to take a minute to talk about it anyway. I said earlier, if you have kids in public schools in this District of Columbia

who are not making adequate yearly progress, there are consequences for those schools. There are efforts to help them, but there are also consequences.

For charter schools here, if kids are not making progress, if you continue year after year to fall short, there are consequences for that school, and in the end fairly severe ones. If instead of taking this \$13 million and distributing it in vouchers to send the kids to, let's say, 80 different schools--instead of doing that, with maybe 25 kids to a school--instead, we are going to take that \$13 million and fund one new school for 2,000 kids, and maybe have 80 classrooms, with 25 kids in a classroom, if we use the \$13 million in that way, we would expect that school and those students under No Child Left Behind to make progress and to make adequate yearly progress. And if they did not, under No Child Left Behind, that school would get help. And eventually, if they continue to fail, they would face dire consequences.

Stick with me on this, if you will. What we propose to do with this voucher demonstration is to take \$13 million, and instead of creating one school with 80 classrooms, we might take the \$13 million and give it to kids who will go to 80 different private schools somewhere here in the District; and it might be roughly 25 kids in each of those schools, but they add up to 2,000.

Some will go to schools, and they are going to be tested, and they will do pretty well. Some will go to schools, and they will be tested, under the District's test, and they are not going to do so well; and they

may not do so well next year and the year after that and the year after that.

I wish it were possible somehow to take the results of those 2,000 kids who are going to be spread, in this example, in 80 schools across the District to actually bring back, to aggregate, and to see how well they did in making adequate yearly progress. And as it turns out, we could actually do that. We would not have to impose No Child Left Behind on the individual private schools. I would not want to do that.

But we can certainly find out how those kids are doing in those private or parochial schools, and see if they are making, collectively, adequate yearly progress.

Earlier this year--I wish I could find the quotation--President Bush was talking--I think it was maybe in July--about this experiment with vouchers in the District of Columbia.

If you bear with me, I want to see if I can find that quotation. At the very least, I will give you part of it. He said words to this effect: It is the taxpayers' money. We want to know. We want to know in a public school or in a private school whether or not the children are learning.

Bear with me just for one moment. The quote is too good to miss. I will find it, and then I will be able to read it in its entirety. Here is what the President said. And again, this is from July of this year. I am going to read it because I think he has it right. This is absolutely on the money talking about his vision for a DC voucher program. This is what he said:

The same accountability system applies to the recipient school as it does the public schools in Washington. After all, it's taxpayers' money. We want to know. We want to know in a public school or a private school whether or not the children are learning.

I could not have said it better myself.

The negotiations we have had with our friends on the other side--and I just want to say to Senator *DeWine*, I said this privately, and I will say it publicly, I very much admire the way he and Senator *Landrieu* work together as the chairman of the subcommittee and as ranking member. I thank them very much for the good faith that I think they and their staff demonstrated in trying to find a middle ground on some of these complex and admittedly difficult issues.

While I believe it is important that the kids who will use these vouchers in this experimental program come out of schools that are failing--not everyone thinks that; I think so--I think it is important that the voucher actually offsets the cost of the tuition fully. Not everyone agrees with that. I certainly think so.

I think the teachers in those private and parochial schools have to meet certain standards or credentialing qualifications. We could probably work through most of that.

We fell apart in our negotiations on three points. One was this idea of: Is there some way we can fairly reasonably make sure we hold those who are using public dollars, Federal dollars--for the first time, I think, for vouchers--can we hold them accountable under No Child Left

Behind, and in a way somewhat as we hold charter schools and other public school kids accountable?

I had a conversation with an administration official this afternoon, and I thought it was a telling conversation. She said to me--words to this effect--we can't agree with doing what you and Senator *Landrieu* want because the kids who are coming from these schools, who will be using these vouchers--falling under certain income limits; 185 percent of poverty--they are going to be some of our toughest kids to help raise student achievement and to demonstrate adequate yearly progress. And there was just a reluctance and a fear they were setting themselves up for failure under this demonstration program.

What the President said is the same accountability system applies to recipient schools as it does to the public schools of Washington, DC.

We have to be smart enough to figure out a way to put that kind of accountability plan in place in a voucher program so that it does not discourage private or parochial schools from joining in this experiment. And if the kids who use those vouchers and go to the public and private schools don't make adequate yearly progress, we should not continue to fund those programs.

One of the great frustrations for me with what we are setting up here, without the kind of provisions Senator *Landrieu* and I are talking about, is we will end up not knowing for sure at the end of the day, and for 5 years, or whatever, whether this actually works to raise student achievement, comparing apples and

apples, oranges and oranges, being able to compare those 2,000 kids with another 2,000 kids in charter schools and 2,000 kids in public schools. We will not know absolutely. And we should know.

For people who don't like vouchers, for those who think we should not put a dime in vouchers, they should know after 5 years that it works. And maybe we should consider, as we said, other school districts. By the same token, for those who think vouchers are the best thing since sliced bread, it would be great to have an experiment that demonstrated that at the end of 5 years, maybe it does not work. And other schools around the State, other cities or school districts would say: They tried it in DC. It was a fair experiment, and it didn't work. They could decide to go ahead and have their own experiment and do it themselves. But we need a test and experiment that nobody can question at the end of the day that it wasn't done fairly and squarely on all counts. I feel disappointed tonight. I really do. I am not angry, but I am disappointed. I have invested some personal time. My staff has. Senator *Landrieu* has invested a whole lot more. I know Senator *DeWine* has. I don't feel good about this because we ended up having spent all this time without coming to the kind of consensus I hoped we could. I fear we will pass a bill ultimately that will be flawed, not flawed in the sense of the Senate version, but the House version, because that is a badly flawed voucher proposal. I fear we will pass something that is not what it could be. We will go to conference and what comes out of conference will be a whole lot worse than what is

being contemplated here in the Senate.

The last thing I want to say is this: If we had been able to reach agreement that these vouchers would only be used for some of the 9,400 kids who are today in failing schools in the District, we would have eliminated a real stumbling block going forward. If we had been able to work out with smart people in the administration, smart people who work around here, a way to make sure that the same accountability or some comparable accountability system that we used under No Child Left Behind for charter schools and public schools--that we can apply that in the way I described earlier for these 2,000 kids--if we can do that, we have eliminated a major stumbling block.

Senator *Landrieu* and I are reluctant, though, even if we passed a measure that had those provisions in it and the other principle she has talked about already, to go to conference even with a good bill without the assurance that what is going to come out of conference will be consistent with those principles. I would feel pretty foolish if we struck a good agreement, a sound agreement that we felt proud of, and went to conference and ended up with something else that was a horse of a different color.

We are not going to come to agreement, I am afraid, on those two major principles that we talked about here tonight, if our friends on the other side can't give us an assurance that even if we were, those principles would survive the conference. I understand that is a difficult thing to

do. Having said that, I must say that that understanding doesn't diminish at all my disappointment that we have fallen short.

I yield back.