

they are going to choose a private school or private faith-based school.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what does that do? What does that say to us? That is saying to us that if we give that parent a choice, they are going to choose the private school or the private faith-based school. That, in itself, is an indictment on poor schools. We are not indicting public schools. Those who say that we are hurting public schools, they are the ones that are indicting public schools.

And then we hear, we hear this. We say we cannot use this legislation for kids to go to other public schools. With these HELP scholarships, kids can go to other public schools, they can leave the school that is not working and go to a public school that is working. Or those parents can go to a private school or private faith-based school.

Frederick Douglas said this: He said some people know the importance of education because they have it. He said, I knew the importance of education because I did not have it. And, Mr. Speaker, we are sending our kids to schools every day of their lives, we are putting them in schools that are failing them every day of their lives, and when they get out into the job market to compete for good jobs, to compete in this global marketplace, they will not have the reading, writing, arithmetic skills, computer skills to compete in a global marketplace.

And then we say we hear, well, they are taking money away from public education. Let me tell my colleagues who is taking money from public education: The prison system. In every State in the Nation, we have an average of about—in the State of Oklahoma, I think we spend about \$25,000 per year per inmate. And look at the inmates. We do not give them the proper reading skills, the proper writing skills, the proper arithmetic skills, the proper computer skills. Do my colleagues know where they end up? They end up in jail, they end up in prison, and then we spend 20 to 30 thousand a year to keep them in prison to house them. That is where our public education dollars are going.

Mr. Speaker, I say let us give this legislation a chance, let us pass this legislation, give those poor parents who are trapped that the Government has mandated that they must send their kids to schools every day that fail them. With this legislation, those poor parents will have a chance to get their kids out of those schools that failed, into schools that worked, public schools, private schools, or private faith-based schools. Give these parents a chance.

Let us support this legislation.

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 15 seconds to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DOGGETT].

Mr. DOGGETT. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully say to the gentleman that he is passionate all right, but I believe he is passionately wrong, and when he comes to the floor and votes to cut the

school lunch program, votes to cut Head Start by \$137 million, and then comes back to the floor and says, today I am here to help, there is a little bit of a credibility problem.

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentlewoman from Indiana [Ms. CARSON].

(Ms. CARSON asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. CARSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 2746.

Mr. Speaker, education reform can succeed only if it benefits all of the students and not just a select few. To stand here on the floor of this august body and suggest that public schools manufactured the social problems that have been extolled here today such as guns, such as drugs, such as crime, such as teenage pregnancy, is a cruel hoax. Let us not try to fool the American people, and let us not be fooled ourselves.

The vouchers in this bill are also a cruel hoax. They do not give all parents a choice in education. This proposal would not provide nearly enough money to pay for private school tuition for all children. With record enrollments, crumbling buildings, and the growing threats of crime and drugs that our public schools did not create, public schools are facing greater challenges than ever before.

Children in public schools across the land do not have the basic materials that they need to get an education. Diverting resources to private schools is not the answer. Surely we can put the money to better use.

Public schoolchildren need text books, library books, and other fundamental tools for learning. The globalization of the economy poses greater challenges to our children than those ever faced by previous generations, including myself. Today our children need math, science, and training in computers to be able to get on the first rung of competition for the jobs of the 21st century. Public schools need the resources to meet these challenges.

I urge in the strongest possible terms that H.R. 2746 be defeated.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 10 seconds to the gentleman from Oklahoma [Mr. WATTS].

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the gentleman from Texas talked about what happened. It is interesting that in the school lunch program we put \$200 million more in our program than the President offered in his. So that is amazing to me how that is a cut. And, secondly, this is one of the same people that said we were gutting Medicare to give tax breaks to the wealthy, one of the same people that said we could not cut taxes and balance the budget at the same time when we have done all those things. So, you know, let us separate the facts from the fiction and let us talk about the facts today.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield a minute and a half to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. PAUL].

(Mr. PAUL asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation. I have been on the education committee now for 10 months, and I have not yet heard any Member stand up and brag about the public school system. Everybody seems to be critical of the system, and everybody has suggestions on what we can do.

I think the problem with the school system has definitely gotten worse since we have gained control of the public school system at the national level. There is pretty good evidence to this, and I think a new program and new expenditures up here will not do the trick. This program, however, does not fall into that category.

I believe that the States ought to have the right to set up one of these programs where scholarships can be offered. This is quite a bit different than mandating and dictating a brand new program and new appropriations. So I think this is a step in the right direction.

We should not be fearful of choice; we should not be fearful of competition. If we are serious about education, I think we should get beyond equating good education with the school lunch program. I cannot quite see the analogy of saying a good lunch is equivalent to good education.

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But, more Federal programs will not solve the problem, and I believe very sincerely that if we allow some choice and if we allow some competition, we might see some improvement.

I do not believe this program is going to solve the problem of our educational system. We have serious structural problems. Some day we will have to look at the history of the public school system and look to the time when the public schools worked much better with local control and local financing.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to express my support for H.R. 2746, the Helping Empower Low-Income Parents [HELP] Scholarships Amendments of 1997. The HELP Act allows States to use title VI funds for school voucher programs if the State has a voucher law. Nothing in this bill forces states to adapt a voucher program, states without voucher programs will not lose a penny of federal funds. HELP does not create a new federal program, nor does it provide a justification for an increase in federal education funds. Furthermore, this bill addresses the legitimate concerns that federally funded voucher programs will lead to state regulations of private schools by explicitly stating that receipt of these funds cannot be used as a reason for force religious schools to alter their curriculum, or force private schools to change their admission requirements. Additionally, participating private schools must only be in compliance with state regulations in effect one year prior to passage of the HELP Act.

Under 10th amendment to the Constitution, the question of whether or not to fund private-school voucher programs is a left solely to the

state and localities. However, congressional activism has undermined state and local control of education as the federal education bureaucracy has grown increasingly powerful. Thus, many states now feel compelled to obey federal dictates and only engage in those education policies for which they can receive federal funds.

Individual states, localities and, in many cases, even private citizens cannot afford to support education programs without financial help from the federal government because of the oppressive tax burden imposed on the American people by this Congress! Congress then "returns" the money (minus a hefty federal "administrative" fee) to state governments and the American people to spend on federally approved purposes.

While the very existence of federal education programs and funding is an insult to the Constitution, and while the most effective education reform to entirely defund the federal education bureaucracy and return education funding to America's parents through deep tax credits and tax cuts, the more options the federal government provides states, localities, and individuals in the use of federal education dollars the better. Mr. Speaker, authority for funding education belongs to the people and the states. We in Congress have no legal or moral justification for denying the people the right to pursue any education reform they believe will help America's children—whether it is vouchers, charter schools, or statewide testing.

Mr. Speaker, my long-term goal remains the restoration of limited, constitutional government in all areas, including education. Until that goal is achieved, I will support measures, such as the one now before us, to give the states and the people as much control as possible over education dollars. After all, in the words of the pledge to abolish the IRS many of us signed last week, it is their money, not ours. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 2746, the Helping Empower Low-Income Parents [HELP] Scholarships Amendments of 1997.

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New Jersey [Mrs. ROUKEMA].

(Mrs. ROUKEMA asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. ROUKEMA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this legislation.

These are not scholarships. These are vouchers, and vouchers are not the way to improve the public school system.

In the first place, I question the constitutionality of using Federal dollars for private and parochial schools. But putting that question aside, this proposal will not be for all low-income students, and if it were for all low-income students, we would be creating a new entitlement, and I do not quite know what my friends on this side of the aisle are doing in creating this new program. But, it also opens the question of possible discrimination, and that this discrimination would be providing vouchers to some students, but not all.

Now, one does not have to be a lawyer with a law degree or a rocket scientist to predict that if this is passed, there will be with certainty a lawsuit

that will be filed claiming discrimination, and that will be a giant step towards an entitlement.

However, put that aside too. The most important issue is what it is going to do to the public school system. Now, as a former school board member, I have some experience in these matters, and I want to tell my colleagues that it will greatly reduce support of the public schools, both urban and suburban, and ultimately, these vouchers will result in gutting the public school system, because it will be sending more and more of scarce financial resources out of the public system and into the private school system. It will be reducing financial support for the majority of students, the vast majority, and support a select few.

Gutting the public school system will not help those students who remain behind. What we need to do is to improve the system and improve the quality of standards for all students, not this select few.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the HELP Scholarship Act. This is just another way of saying these are not scholarships, these are vouchers, and vouchers are not the way to improve our education system.

In the first place, I question the constitutionality of whether Federal dollars can be used for private and parochial schools. The Constitution provides for a division between church and State, and this proposal will interfere with that division. Such proposals have been found unconstitutional when they have not been provided to all low-income students, or when the tuition grant program has been used primarily to assist children in attending schools which are religiously affiliated.

This proposal will not be for all low-income students, and if it were to be provided for all low-income students then it would be an entitlement. And we do not need any more entitlements.

Why would we, as a Republican Party, be moving toward an entitlement. This is a problem of possible claims of discrimination—that is discrimination in providing some students with vouchers. This also moves us toward creating an entitlement.

How will it be decided which students will be provided with the vouchers? Doesn't this discriminate against the other students who are not given vouchers? It does not take a law degree or a rocket scientist to predict with certainty that a lawsuit will be filed claiming discrimination and that will be a giant step toward the entitlement.

Most important and as a former school board member with some experience in these matters, it will force regionalization of the public school system, greatly reduce support of the public schools, both urban and suburban, and ultimately these vouchers will result in gutting the public school system—because it will be sending more and more of our scarce financial resources out of the public system and into the private system. It will be reducing financial support for the vast majority to support a select few.

As a former teacher and school board member in my home community, I have always supported our public school system. I believe that our schools are best prepared to meet the

educational needs of our youth when decisions about our school are made by that local community.

Gutting the public school system will not help those students who remain behind in the public school system. What we need to do is improve the system, and improve the quality and standards for all the students, not a select few.

It is also disturbing that these funds will be taken from title VI dollars. These funds are to be used for instructional materials, library materials, magnet schools, literacy programs, gifted and talented programs, dropout assistance, and other school reform activities. If school choice becomes an allowable use of funds, then these activities will not receive the funding and attention that they deserve.

This is not the way to improve our schools.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 10 seconds to the gentleman from Oklahoma [Mr. WATTS].

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, I say to the gentlewoman from New Jersey [Mrs. ROUKEMA], and all of those who would say "discrimination," the ultimate discrimination, the ultimate economic and racial discrimination, is to keep these poor kids, these poor black kids, these poor white kids, these poor kids in schools that do not work, and the government mandates to those parents they must send their kids to those schools. It is the ultimate discrimination to do this to these poor kids.

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WELDON], another longtime champion of parental choice in education.

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding me this time. I just want to respond a little bit further to the gentlewoman from New Jersey [Mrs. ROUKEMA]. There has been a lot of talk about hurting public schools and that our agenda should be helping public schools.

I think our agenda really should be helping kids get a good education, and saving and protecting public schools sometimes is involved in that, but sometimes these public schools are so bad that they should be closed down, and I am really pleased to see this bill come to the floor. I worked with the gentleman from California last session on trying to get a school choice bill to the floor.

One of the reasons why I am so interested in this issue is one of the things I noticed when I got out of the Army and I went into private practice is that people with money send their kids to the schools of their choice, but poor people and people who are disadvantaged cannot do that. They are locked in a system, frequently a system that is failing. Some of our public schools are great, but some of them are failing miserably, and every time we try to talk about school choice, the same group of people get up and say, no, no, no, we cannot have school choice.

All we have here is a modest bill to try it. Let me tell my colleagues something. The American people support