

democracy and hope will take place. Good will triumph over evil. Democracy will triumph over tyranny. Security will triumph over terrorism. Peace will come to Iraq. And all of us in America will be safer as a result.

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, in the time remaining, I raise one other issue, the issue of opportunity scholarships, of expanded choice for students, the issue of the debate we are having over the opportunity for the children of the District of Columbia to take advantage of a "voucher" program. We do not like to use that word. In my State, it is a pretty divisive word.

The Mayor of Washington, Anthony Williams, says this is the right thing to do. As a former mayor, I will stand with Mayor Williams. This is a very divisive issue in my city of St. Paul. When I ran, I said I would not push vouchers for the people of Minnesota. We had our debate. We have gone a different path, expanding charter schools. St. Paul, my city, had the first charter school in the Nation. As mayor, we started 20 more charter schools, providing tax incentives and tax credits so parents could get money back and use money they need to support their kids' education, to give their kids more choice. That makes sense.

But more needs to be done. I recognize that. This is a divisive issue. When the Mayor of the District of Columbia is saying we need to do this for our kids, why not do it? It is not taking any money from my kids in Minnesota. It is not taking any money from any kids in any of the other States. We have a local, elected official saying we need to do this; our kids are failing and we need to give them more hope and opportunity. Why not do it? What are we afraid of?

When I was mayor of St. Paul, the Governor offered, I believe, \$13 million to any community that would simply do a pilot project offering opportunity scholarships to the poorest of the poor and only the kids who were not succeeding.

So you were not going to take the cream of the crop. You were not going to cherry-pick. You were going to take those who were not making it. You have to do something. In fact, the offer was that out of this \$13 million, he would give \$10 million to the school district to do whatever they wanted. Only \$3 million would be for this pilot project. And not a single elected official, other than myself, would stand up and do it.

What are we afraid of? If all you keep doing is what you have been doing, all you are going to get is more of the same. Our children need more hope and opportunity. I hope we have the courage to give it a shot and a chance. The downside is minimal. The opportunity is great. Let's seize the opportunity. Let's do this for the kids. Let's do the right thing. Let's make change. Let's give hope.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COLEMAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2658, which the clerk will state by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2658) making appropriations for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate, and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by all of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

The Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 24, 2003.)

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am pleased to present to the Senate, on behalf of myself and the Senator from Hawaii, Mr. INOUE, who is currently chairing the Indian Affairs Committee, the Defense appropriations conference report for fiscal year 2004.

This conference report was approved by the House of Representatives by a vote of 407 to 15. It has overwhelming bipartisan support. The agreement provides for a total of \$368.7 billion for the Department for fiscal year 2004. Throughout our conversations with the House over the past months, Senator INOUE and I have sought to strike a balanced agreement that we believe addresses key requirements for readiness, quality of life, and reconstitution of our defense force.

As we take up this conference report on the floor today, there are hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform deployed and serving our country at home and abroad. They are performing superbly, and we are extremely proud of what they are accomplishing. This agreement is a dem-

onstration of our support, the Congress's support, for our men and women in uniform.

It provides a 4.1 percent average pay raise for all military personnel. It funds an increase in basic allowance for housing to reduce average out-of-pocket expenses from 7.5 percent to 3.5 percent for our military people. It provides an additional \$128 million for the continuation of increased rates for imminent-danger pay and family-separation allowances.

This agreement honors the commitment we have made to our Armed Forces—one we will maintain. It helps ensure they will continue to have good leadership, first-rate training, modernized equipment, and quality infrastructure. The agreement provides \$115.9 billion for operation and maintenance, \$74.7 billion for procurement, and \$65.2 billion for research and development.

Defense is a very expensive concept for our country. That is so not only because we have a volunteer service but because we are modernizing our force for the future. This agreement is the result of a bicameral, bipartisan approach. I urge the Senate to adopt this conference report.

Let me once again thank my co-chairman, Senator INOUE, for his support and invaluable counsel on this bill. I would also like to note the dedicated work of his chief of staff Charlie Houy, Betsy Schmid, and Nicole DiResta.

I thank my hard-working staff led by Sid Ashworth and including Tom Hawkins, Kraig Siracuse, Bob Henke, Lesley Kalan, Jennifer Chartrand, Menda Fife, Brian Wilson, Mazie Mattson, Nicole Royal, and Alycia Farrell. They have helped put together this conference report and worked with us through the year to bring us where we are today with the largest defense budget in history and the best bill we have ever presented to the Senate.

I yield to my good friend from Hawaii.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, before I proceed, I wish to commend my chairman, Mr. STEVENS, for bringing this conference report to the Senate. In doing so, I commend him for his leadership. I realize Members of the Senate may not be aware of this, but because of the leadership skills and because of the hard work of the staff, the conference committee concluded its work on this important measure in 2 hours. In 2 hours, we concluded a bill that was filled with controversy and issues. At the end, the vote was unanimous.

The conferees recommend \$368.7 billion in mandatory and discretionary appropriations for the coming year. It is a huge sum, but it is a sum that is absolutely necessary.

This is nearly half a billion less than recommended by the Senate and \$3.6 billion less than requested by the President. We have tried our best to trim what some would call "fat."