

Students spend less time competing for attention and more time learning. Students in smaller classes out-perform their peers.

For children in struggling communities, from remote rural areas to inner-city neighborhoods, small class size is even more critical. And with school enrollments at record highs and expected to keep rising, we must act now to reduce class size in all our Nation's public schools.

Across the country, more and more communities are recognizing the importance of smaller class size and trying to do something about it. To help them meet this challenge I called on Congress early last year to pass my initiative to reduce class size by helping school districts hire 100,000 highly trained teachers. I'm pleased that Republican Members of Congress joined with Democrats and did the right thing in making a big downpayment toward meeting our goal.

Today the Department of Education is releasing guidelines that will let every school district in our Nation know how much money they will receive and how best to use the funds to reduce class size in time for school this fall. But communities deciding now whether to hire and train new teachers for next year need to know whether they can count on the commitment Congress made last year to help them reduce class size for years to come. It is time to finish the job.

Now, this week the Senate and House will vote on a bill that gives States the flexibility they need to improve their public schools in spending Federal aid they receive. I support this bill. But I also strongly support efforts by Senators Murray and Kennedy, and Representatives Clay and Wu, to add an amendment to it that will fully fund 100,000 well-trained teachers over the next 6 years.

Unfortunately, Republican leaders are trying to shut down debate on the ed-flex bill before this important amendment on more teachers and smaller classes can even be voted on. Now, last October, just before the election, Republicans joined us in promising the American people more teachers and smaller classes. Less than 5 months later, we now have the first big test of whether this Congress is really willing to work together across party lines and with the White House to get things done for the American people,

whether the Congress is serious about giving our children the education they need and deserve.

The choice is simple: Are we going to give Americans smaller classes or more partisanship? Are we going to put politics ahead of progress or put 100,000 teachers in our Nation's classrooms? I call on the Senate to allow an up-or-down vote on the Murray-Kennedy class size amendment, and I urge every Senator to vote for it. When it comes to our children's future, politics must stop at the schoolhouse door.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:08 p.m. on March 5 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Death of Amir Essa bin Salman Al-Khalifa of Bahrain

March 6, 1999

I would like to express my deep sadness at the news that Shaikh Essa bin Salman Al-Khalifa of Bahrain has passed away. The prayers and condolences of all Americans go out to the royal family and the people of Bahrain.

The Amir was a good friend of the American people and a good friend of peace. He shared our desire to see a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. I take heart from the personal commitment to forwarding the cause of peace the Amir expressed during his recent June visit to the United States. The Amir shared his heartfelt hope to see peace come to his region in eloquent and passionate words.

Shaikh Essa did much to deepen and strengthen the historic relationship between America and Bahrain. He will be missed.

Remarks to the Community in Posoltega, Nicaragua

March 8, 1999

Thank you very much. President Aleman, Mayor Zeledon, Mayor Palacios, Bishop