

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES OVER
THE DEATH OF INTERNATIONAL
AID WORKERS IN BOSNIA

HON. JOHN EDWARD PORTER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 18, 1997

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my deep sadness over the loss of 12 aid workers in Bosnia—including 5 American citizens who were working to rebuild civil society in that troubled country—in a helicopter crash earlier this week.

These individuals represent the best of America, and they have sacrificed their lives in an effort to bring our ideals to a country which has been torn apart by hatred and intolerance. All of these individuals, and the others who have lost their lives trying to bring lasting peace to Bosnia and other countries, are heroes and we should mourn their deaths as we would mourn the loss of our men and women in uniform. Every day in the world's trouble spots, there are countless people from many nations who dedicate their lives to improving the future for others. They make tremendous sacrifices, often leaving their families and homes behind to work in a hostile, dangerous environment to help strangers who do not always fully appreciate the benefit they are receiving.

Gerd Wagner, one of the most respected and accomplished diplomats in Bosnia, was among those who perished in this tragic accident. Mr. Wagner had been playing a key role in bringing together Muslims and Croats in central Bosnia. In addition, several members of a team that was working to rebuild Bosnia's civil police force died in the crash. This project is one of the most important elements of securing peace in Bosnia. My wife, Kathryn, knew some of these individuals personally, and had a chance to see what they were accomplishing during a visit to Bosnia last month. We have been deeply affected by this tragedy, and it has served to remind us both—as it should all Members of this House—that our foreign assistance program is not just an abstraction. It is real people doing important work, often without recognition or thanks.

I know that it is too late to thank those who died in the helicopter crash on Wednesday, but I do want to take this opportunity to commend all of those caring and committed people who put their lives on the line every day to secure peace and democracy in places like Bosnia. Your work is a living memorial to those 12 people who died on a mountain in central Bosnia. May your work continue to serve their memory well.

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR,
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED
APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

SPEECH OF

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 16, 1997

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2264) making ap-

propriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies, for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes:

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in reluctant support of Representative GOODLING's amendment to prohibit the use of funds in the bill to develop and administer a national testing program in reading and mathematics. I believe that Congress and the President have still not committed themselves to a serious discussion of education policy or spending in this country. Unfortunately this standard continues today as the parties on both sides of this issue have sought to hide behind this national testing initiative by labeling it as either a remedy for many of the problems this country is having with elementary and secondary education or some nefarious effort on the part of the Federal Government to become more involved in education curriculum.

The national testing program included in this legislation deserves neither of these classifications. If implemented and carefully monitored, it has a number of provisions that will be of great assistance to both State and Federal policymakers as well as parents interested in their child's education. However, I oppose the national testing initiative included in this bill because it does not ensure that this Government will take any steps to address the disparity in mathematics and reading proficiency that we all know this testing will demonstrate. The local areas where there are concentrated numbers of students that are dropping out of high school, failing, and scoring low on the sporadic tests administered now desperately need direct injections of funding from the Federal Government. We can all argue about what types of restrictions or demands should be tied to these funds at a later date. In the meantime, we should implement a national testing program that includes a national formula for focused education spending, and we should do it as quickly as possible.

Let me discuss some reasons why I believe this national testing initiative could produce a number of benefits for parents and State governments interested in improving elementary and secondary education. However, I will first address the concerns of the many parents that educate their children at home who have contacted my office to express their opinions on this amendment. I respect your decision to home-school your children very much. However, the vast majority of children in the United States are educated at public schools, and it is essential that elected officials and education planners on the Federal and local level have the resources needed to develop effective public policy. National testing will fulfill that need without unduly intruding on your right to practice home-schooling.

This national testing program would allow States or local education agencies [LEA's] to voluntarily administer specific tests to every fourth grade pupil in reading and eighth grade pupil in math. I do not believe enough emphasis can be placed on the fact that this program would be voluntary, and participation in these tests would not affect a State or LEA's eligibility for assistance under Federal aid programs. Any effort to extend the Federal role in this process beyond the design and administration of these tests would require further congressional action, and as we all know, that is simply not going to happen.

At the present time, there is no current education test that every pupil in every grade takes nationwide. One or more tests are administered to virtually every pupil in many grades in almost all States, but these tests vary from State to State. Some States develop their own tests, others are members of multi-State consortia that develop assessments, and others administer tests developed by commercial publishers. The National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP] is the closest existing initiative to a national testing program. However, the NAEP only determines mathematics and reading proficiency in samples of school children.

The present education testing system prevents policymakers in many States from comparing their education statistics with other States. If an effective education program is implemented in one State and then copied in another, for example, the two State governments may not be able to compare the success of their efforts because of difficulties in correlating the research statistics or even a lack of well-documented results.

More importantly, the current system prevents a parent from being able to compare their children's academic achievement with other students on a local, State, or national level. A parent whose child makes average grades may be satisfied with their child's academic progress. Unfortunately, these parents will not be aware that their child may have fallen behind the rest of their classmates until they take their SAT's at the age of 18.

This proposal will provide every parent of every child in a State or LEA that chooses to participate with comparisons of their child's results to other students at their school, in the State, and in the Nation. If every family receives that envelope in the mail, I believe there will be a lot of parents who choose to get more involved in their child's education, which after all is what the majority of my colleagues will agree is the most effective education policy there can be.

I am concerned that a national test may be constructed in a manner that is biased against traditionally undereducated populations, such as African-Americans and Hispanics. If Federal funding was tied to the improvement of test scores in areas that score poorly, this bias could lead to underserved sanctions in regions that have high numbers of minorities. As a result, if a national testing program is implemented in the future, we will have to pay careful attention to the design of the tests and remain skeptical of any effort to create a Federal enforcement procedure. However, national testing's benefits for these populations far outweigh these risks. By motivating parents to pay more attention to their child's academic development and providing policymakers the empirical evidence needed to design effective education policies targeted at minorities, this initiative will produce the first real effort to address the failure of current education policies in these areas.

In the end, we are not interested in creating a uniform national education curriculum; we are only demanding a uniform national education outcome—a system where every child has the same opportunity to succeed through an advanced public education system. In my home State of Mississippi, sampled children already score well below the national average on the NAEP's fourth grade reading test and are ranked in the bottom fifth in eighth grade

math proficiency. If a well-planned, voluntary national testing program could be coupled with a funding distribution system directed at those areas most in need, then I would be happy to

support such an initiative. I hope that this Congress and the administration will reconsider the design of a national testing program. However, above all, we must cease this piecemeal

education policymaking and begin a legitimate debate on the whole education policy