

does not need to ensure that as a matter of Federal policy, it will: support public-private efforts designed to assist in the Capital's revitalization; support creative, imaginative, and unique approaches; support the streamlining of the Federal and District review and regulatory processes, where appropriate, to encourage revitalization; and exercise appropriate oversight to ensure that the District honors all of its contractual and financial commitments.

It is well understood by the Congress that the District of Columbia continues to suffer from past financial problems. For example, D.C. has experienced issues with a number of its current vendors as a result of its prior reputation of poor payment performance. A recent newspaper article documented that one of the reasons for schools not having textbooks was "... twelve textbook companies refused to ship books because the District still owes for previous orders."

Prior negligence in these matters created a ripple effect that has a broad and negative reach. Vendors have been discouraged from responding to DC RFP's because of concerns over the selection process. Congress can assist in eliminating this perception without direct intervention. Congress can also assure all current and prospective private sector partners and their respective lenders that it will monitor and respond appropriately to any failing by the government of D.C. to meet acceptable government contracting practices.

VETERANS' BENEFITS ACT OF 1997

SPEECH OF

HON. ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA

OF AMERICAN SAMOA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Sunday, November 9, 1997

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 714, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 1997. I very much appreciate the efforts of Chairman BOB STUMP and Senior Democrat LANE EVANS for their assistance in moving this bill forward this year. Subcommittee Chairman JACK QUINN and Senior Democrat BOB FILNER also deserve special recognition for their assistance and support. Senator DANIEL AKAKA of Hawaii and Congressman NEIL ABERCROMBIE of Hawaii also deserves special recognition for introducing this legislation and the companion bill in the House, H.R. 2317.

Even though we are continuing to reduce the size of our military forces, we have a sizable number of veterans who served this Nation both in times of war and peace. Many of these veterans now suffer from physical injuries or mental illness directly attributable to their military service. Today's legislation will provide further assistance to these individuals who sacrificed so that we may all enjoy our liberties.

Mr. Speaker, of particular importance to the veterans in my congressional district is section 201 of this legislation, which extends and improves the Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program.

It was only 5 years ago with the implementation of the Native American Veterans Housing Pilot Program that there has been a mechanism for the U.S. veterans residing in American Samoa to obtain home loans through the

Department of Veterans Affairs. It took about 2 years for the Department and the American Samoa government to work out an agreement implementing the law.

To the credit of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 48 American Samoan veterans were able to obtain loans under the pilot program and they are now either living in those homes or the homes are under construction. The Department has not had to repossess any of these loans because of a lender default. The pilot program has been equally successful for native Hawaiians living on Hawaiian homelands.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the authorization for the pilot program expired on September 30, 1997, and since that time, veterans in Samoa are again left with no VA home loan program in operation. The prompt action by the Senate and today by the House will renew this necessary authorization for the VA to begin again making home loans in American Samoa.

While the bill has met with considerable success in Samoa, many of our American Indians living on reservations in the continental United States still are not eligible for loans under this program. I am pleased that we are able to achieve agreement on the outreach provisions, which should be of some assistance.

NATIONAL TESTING

HON. WILLIAM F. GOODLING

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 13, 1997

Mr. GOODLING. Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks there has been much debate in this body and across the country about whether we should have national testing of fourth and eighth graders as proposed by the Clinton administration.

Just a few days ago, the Congress said "no." The conference report on the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill, H.R. 2264, prohibits any pilot testing, field testing, implementation, administration or dissemination of national tests in fiscal year 1998. And, I might also add, during the course of 1998, the National Academy of Sciences will be conducting three studies related to testing and reporting back to Congress.

Next year the Committee on Education and the Workforce, which I chair, will hold several hearings on the authorization of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the National Assessment Governing Board. At that time, the issue of national testing will be back before the Congress.

In the regard, I wanted to bring to the attention of my colleagues a well-thought-out letter and op-ed article "The Tyranny of Testing", The New York Times, October 2, 1997, I recently received from Dr. Mark F. Bernstein, Superintendent of Schools in North Merrick, NY. In his letter and article, Dr. Bernstein points out how national tests could nationalize school curriculum. I commend his letter and article to my colleagues, both of which are attached to this statement.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES,
NORTH MERRICK, NY,

October 9, 1997.

Hon. WILLIAM GOODLING,
Chairman of the Committee on Education and Work Force,

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC

DEAR CONGRESSMAN GOODLING: Enclosed is a copy, which you may have already seen, of my recent submission that appeared in The New York Times Op-Ed page (October 2, 1997) entitled "The Tyranny of Testing." I believe this topic to be extremely important to the future of public education. I'd like to share my thinking with you and ask for your advice.

The main premise of my piece is that national testing and national curriculum are one and the same. In spite of Secretary of Education Riley's assertion that one can differentiate between supporting national testing (which he does) and opposing national curriculum (which he also does), educators agree that "what is tested is what will be taught." Teachers and administrators spend incredible amounts of time pouring over test questions to analyze the content of each question so to assure that no curriculum gaps exist. And, when a significant number of students answer certain questions incorrectly, teachers rework the curriculum to guarantee that students will be taught that specific material so to answer these questions correctly the next time around. We call this process "item analysis." In addition to using tests for the purpose of differentiating among students through grades, tests are specifically developed to drive curriculum and textbook selection. If one accepts my premise that national testing is synonymous with the development of national curriculums, then one must decide if it is in the best interests of our children to have a uniform curriculum in the areas of reading and mathematics (and perhaps social studies, language arts and science). Though a good argument can be offered to support such a decision, the inherent risks far outweigh the potential benefits.

People who support a national testing program believe that too many students are failing and drastic steps must be taken to improve their education. And, they hold, the Federal government is the only one who can do it. Through a series of national tests which will point-out failing schools, the argument goes, learning will be improved as a result of increased public attention. They point to student populations in many of our large cities or rural areas where student results are absolutely dismal. (There are probably some suburban communities that have less than stellar results as well.) If only parents were aware of how poorly their children's schools were performing, increased competition and accountability would force schools to improve. How simplistic! Ignored is the research which strongly suggests that poor student performance is significantly correlated with low per-public expenditures, parents' own educational attainment levels, and family poverty. Though we all want higher educational standards and improved student achievement, national testing poses real dangers to public education, and to the role delineation between the Federal government and the states.

One has only to recall our recent experience with the process of developing history standards to shudder at the prospect of national tests. A panel of "recognized experts" was brought together after the panel membership was debated ad nauseam to insure a proper balance of ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, etc. These well-intentioned individuals then embarked on the never-ending task of determining what all American school children should learn about their

country's history. Before they reached the American Revolution, their work was torn asunder. Advocates for American Indians, for African-Americans, as well as Italian-Americans, and a host of other cultural interests, not to mention religious groups, screamed that their constituents' contributions were under represented. Scholars were vociferous in asserting their disagreements regarding the proper priority given geography versus economics, environment versus nationalism; human rights versus urbanization, etc. The end-product was an incoherent set of history standards which continues to be attacked to this day and not utilized! Whether the new panel of experts is to be selected by the Secretary of Education or a nonpartisan board is inconsequential; more troubling is the process that would be followed to create a consensus, to reduce criticism, and to advance the political correctness of our time.

The ineffectiveness of such a panel of experts is far less dangerous as compared to the possibility that the panel members have a preconceived agenda motivated by strong desires to change American education and society. Is it inconceivable that a certain group of ideologues—be it political or religious—will achieve a dominant position on this panel? And, is it inconceivable that they would then use the position to perniciously advance their deeply-held beliefs? And, what better way to effectuate a change in America than through its children's education? Consider the formulation of history standards, once again. A national history curriculum offers innumerable and immeasurable opportunities to inject one's biases into material related to world religions and cultures, political and economic systems, human and societal rights, etc. The dangers of curriculum intrusion are real in that many Americans feel that our schools are devoid of values. What better way to integrate values than through a uniform national curriculum?

A third reason to reject national curriculum is to prevent the bipartisan panel of experts from imposing a specific educational strategy upon all American students. We have had several examples over the past years of education "fads," products of university think tanks that often did little real-life research to support their conclusions. The 1960s saw the "new math" assume prominence in elementary and secondary math classrooms. Set theory was in vogue and replaced more traditional math computation and word problems, practically ousting them from the curriculum. In the 1970s "creative writing" was the emphasis in elementary and junior high school classrooms. Teachers were told to ignore spelling errors or sentence structure mishaps for fear of limiting students' creative energies. The result was obvious—students could not spell, punctuate, or clearly express themselves as they reached high school. In the 1980s, the purist version of "whole language" replaced the teaching of phonics, suggesting that all students would benefit from a literature-based curriculum devoid of phonics. (Recently, the National Institute of Health reported that a sizable percentage of American children need a strong phonetic foundation because they have significant learning problems which require a sound phonetic foundation if these children are to even learn how to read.) Until national testing, exposure to the fads of a particular university or school of thought could have been confined to a singular state or region of the country.

Though I've used history at the prime example because of our actual experience, President Clinton has suggested national testing for reading and math. Are the risks as great in these subjects? Yes. Whether it be the reading tests' focus being upon vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or comprehen-

sion, choices will have to be made by the panel. Will calculators be permitted and, if so, in which parts of the math test? Should open-ended word problems be emphasized, and what role will math computation play? And, why would we believe that a national testing program would stop at reading and math?

Developing a national curriculum is subject to the same pressures as affects other public policy decisions—pressure to create a consensus among well-intentioned scholars; pressure from unrelenting ideologues and lobby groups; or pressure to be part of a larger school of thought (or educational fad). These same pressures exist, but to a lesser extent, in each of our State's departments of education. New York State, for example, has finally replaced its 13 year old Global Studies curriculum with one entitled Global History. The former Global Studies course applied a regional approach to the study of history: through the study of distinct regions of the world, students would learn to make connections, or linkages, between different economic systems, or the influence of geography on civilization, etc. Students were confounded by the approach. New York will now return to a chronological approach studying the linkages of major historical themes over time. Local educators have been suggesting the chronological approach for years; yet it took 13 years for us to convince the New York State Department of Education. One can only imagine how long it would take to change a national curriculum and how many millions of students would have suffered in the meantime. States have served well as the laboratories of education, allowing different strategies and practices to be tried, modified, and then expanded or discarded.

Through this rather lengthy letter, I have attempted to describe my concerns regarding a national curriculum and its potential for harm. In addition, there is a strong argument to be made that the Federal government has no right, under the Constitution, to impose a curriculum upon the States and their schools, but I leave that case to others better situated to respond to constitutional issues. Even though President Clinton's proposal is for "voluntary testing", most would agree that the monolithic educational textbook industry would not take very long to distribute to American schools the new curriculum needed to address these tests whether or not districts chose to utilize the test. And now I ask for your advice. Are the concerns expressed in this letter worthy of pursuit and, if so, in what way? Being a local superintendent of schools, I have had the opportunity to express my opinions and influence to some small degree educational policy matters in New York. But, clearly, the subject of national testing is quite different. I would appreciate any insights that you can provide me.

Sincerely,

MARC F. BERNSTEIN, ED.D.
Superintendent of Schools.

[From the New York Times, Oct. 2, 1997]

THE TYRANNY OF TESTS
(By Marc F. Bernstein)

North Merrick, N.Y.—The debate over President Clinton's proposal for voluntary national testing in reading and math has paid too little attention to whether a national curriculum benefits American children.

I know that the President has not recommended a national curriculum, only national testing, but educators know all too well that "what is tested will be taught." Teachers and administrators will pore over sample test questions to determine what ma-

terial must be taught so that students—and therefore teachers and schools—do well.

STANDARD EXAMS WILL NATIONALIZE SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

Without doubt, there are benefits to focusing the public's attention on academic results. It fosters healthy competition among schools and keeps them accountable for teaching children properly.

There is the risk, however, that even the best-intentioned test makers will create a misguided national standard, even though the Senate has stipulated that a bipartisan board independent of the Federal Department of Education be responsible for designing the tests. Who creates the test is less troubling than the process that we in the United States follow to create a consensus, to reduce criticism and to advance the political correctness of our time. One has only to remember the recent debate over history standards to shudder at the prospect of national tests. Plus, national tests would be the battle-ground for proponents of the latest educational trends.

Past movements, like "new math" (and perhaps the more recent "new-new math") or the purists' version of "whole language," were products of university think tanks that often did little real-life research to support their conclusions.

Until now, exposure to the fads of a particular university or school of thought could be confined to a state or to one region of the country. Imagine the risks of applying a little-tested theory to the design of a test given to all American students, a national examination that would in turn determine curriculums and standards.

States have served well as the laboratories of education, allowing different strategies and practices to be tried, modified and then expanded or discarded. Almost every state now has a statewide testing program that permits parents to evaluate their schools and to compare them with similar districts nearby.

A national report card, on the other hand, would be of little use. Is there any validity in having parents in New York compare the state's scores on an eighth-grade math test with those of a more homogeneous state like New Hampshire or Vermont? Most parents can already tell whether their children are getting a good education. Yes, we must continue to strive for higher standards for our children's education, but we can do it without national tests.

H.R. 2964, THE OLDER AND DISABLED AMERICANS PROTECTION ACT OF 1997

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 13, 1997

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to a bill I introduced to provide for the review of criminal records of individuals who wish to enter into shared housing arrangements with senior citizens and disabled persons. H.R. 2964, the Older and Disabled Americans Protection Act of 1997, will empower placement organizations with the authority to run FBI background checks on potential shared housing participants. Many seniors and disabled persons enter into shared housing programs which is a popular option for those who wish to remain at home, but need that little extra care and comfort to live on their own. Shared housing is a nonfee