

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TESTING

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I want to say to the Senator from North Dakota that I have listened with great care to his remarks and with a strong degree of sympathy and support for all that he has to say. I do want to add two cautions or questions that I know he will consider very thoughtfully in this connection, however.

I am here on the floor to speak to an amendment I introduced last night that would take dozens, perhaps hundreds, of categorical programs for education and consolidate them and distribute them on a formula basis to each school district, with a firm belief that our school board members and teachers in various schools throughout the country can make a better determination as to how to use that money than can bureaucrats here in Washington, DC.

But a part of my talk in a few moments will relate to this very question of achievement. I agree with the Senator from North Dakota, but the two caveats I have are these. Will we have a set of national standards or national tests that truly measure learning, knowledge, as we wish it to be?

There is great suspicion that anything sponsored by the Federal Department of Education will be of questionable validity in the real world in showing where our students are. And will a set of national tests drive out more sophisticated and better quality State and/or local tests? Will school districts and State superintendents of public instruction across the country say, fine, we have these national tests now, we don't need to do anything other than to teach to those tests—the very modest one subject in fourth grade and one subject in eighth grade?

I say that because, in preparing for my other comments, I have here the results of the first experimental year of a new set of tests given in the State of Washington to a wide number of students in more than 250 school districts and some private schools throughout the State. Now, these tests are far more sophisticated and far deeper than anything we are talking about here on a national level. Starting in the fourth grade but to be extended up to the tenth grade in the future, students were tested in listening, reading, writing, and mathematics. In other words, four sets of tests, rather than the one called for in the President's proposal.

Moreover, they were tested for their actual mastery of the subjects, rather than just on some sliding scale: Are you in the fiftieth percentile of all the people who took the test, either in the State or across the country? The State of Washington does use the current national tests in some of these areas, which are simply true, false, or a fill-in-the-blank-with-a-pencil kind of test. These new tests, however, in a number of the areas, include essay examinations as well as true, false, or multiple choice tests.

This is what some of the national organizations or experts have to say

about this. I am quoting from last Thursday's Seattle Times.

Washington's new test gets high marks from experts familiar with similar assessments in other States. Most say it will take time for students to meet the new standard and that these kinds of tests, called performance-based assessments, are more demanding than the fill-in-the-bubbles tests most parents and students are used to.

The problem with standardized tests is that they hold schools accountable not for how students do in relation to a fixed standard, but rather in relation to how other students do—"a fuzzy concept," said Dr. Philip Daro of the New Standards Project, a consortium of States and urban districts creating education-reform models.

"Performance-based tests are more realistic, more practical, more like people evaluated in the workplace," Daro said.

The American Federation of Teachers said Washington's standards in English and science meet its criteria for being strong, coherent and useful to teachers and parents. The State's math standards are borderline and its social-studies standards are considered below par, with too little attention given to that history.

Under those consensuses, one of the reasons for the criticism of mathematics is that even in the Washington State tests, among students who rank very high in National College Board examinations and the like, you can get a perfect score in the fourth grade mathematics test even though you have the wrong answer. Some of the SAT questions give a perfect score in this test if you get the reasoning right even if you come up with the wrong answer. That is not going to please the real world, or a potential employer is not going to be comforted by having an employee who may think logically but reaches the wrong answer in a mathematical computation.

Given that, however, Mr. President, it is breathtaking and disappointing to report that in these four areas 62 percent of the fourth graders who took the test in my State exceeded the standard for listening, 48 percent for reading, 32 percent for writing, and 22 percent for mathematics even with the possibility of getting a perfect score on some of the tests on some of the questions in the test without getting the right answer. Twenty-six percent of our fourth grade students flunked all four, or failed to meet the standard in all four, and only 14 percent met the standards in all four.

I was very disturbed by the fact that our State superintendent of public instruction, who is new, and, may I say, said, "We must not be discouraged by results of the assessment, or try to hammer children and teachers." I think we should be discouraged by those results. I don't think we should hammer children and teachers. And I will speak in a few minutes on the proposition that I think they ought to get more direct aid from ourselves, and fewer bureaucrats telling them what to do and how to do it. But these are very disappointing results.

I guess my fear and my only reservation is about the remark on national standards, with which in theory I cer-

tainly agree, in connection with the talk by the Senator from North Dakota is that I would hate to see a set of national standards that we work down to rather than up from.

The same article said that only one State, Iowa, is not engaged in some kind of testing at the present time.

So my real question on this is how do we see it that a set of so-called "national standards" don't end up depreciating, or making less demanding, the requirement to meet certain standards that many States have now and others like my own are moving toward with great rapidity?

I simply have that as a question.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, will the Senator from Washington yield for a question?

Mr. GORTON. He certainly would.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, before I ask the question, I say I think the remarks by Senator GORTON are important and raise the right question.

I would not suggest that we have some sort of aspiration for national testing that would in any way lower standards. We need to raise standards. It seems to me that the proposals that have been advanced, for example, with respect to the reading at the fourth grade level is one of these gateway activities. If you do not get through that fourth grade level and are able to read and go beyond, and you are beyond that and aren't able to read sufficiently, nothing else will come together in your educational career. That is the problem. That is why you need to measure on some of these gateway activities like reading at the fourth grade level and mathematics at the eighth grade level.

The Senator from the State of Washington made a couple of important points. There are some good testing activities going on in some States. Some are terribly deficient. It is important to understand that, whether it is the National Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, or the technology firms in our country who are asking for this and who believe this is an essential part of understanding what we are getting from our educational system and how to fix it. They feel that we have a significant problem. And, in order to fix that problem, you need to figure out where you are, and where you go from that point to fix it. I share that feeling.

I say to the Senator from Washington that the points he made are accurate. Isn't it the case, however, that we should be able to recognize the concern some people have about who would do the testing, or what kind of testing would be done? Shouldn't we be able to overcome those concerns by saying at least we aspire as a Nation to achieve some goals with respect to our children who are in the fourth grade and the eighth grade, and with respect to their meeting the mathematics skills? Shouldn't we be able to meet the concerns that the Senator from Washington expresses?

Mr. GORTON. My answer to that question is an unqualified yes. Of course we should do just that. What we must take great care with is seeing to it that any national standards strengthen and encourage the standards that are already being set in any of the States; that they be able to move forward; not an excuse to move backward; and that they measure real knowledge. I believe that the heart of some of the objections to the national standards are the ones made by the American Federation of Teachers to Washington State mathematics. There just is no way except in the heart of some totally abstract profession that you can justify giving 100 percent to a student who gets the wrong answer to a question. It may be encouraging students to move towards a way to come up with the right answer. But that is not something that ought to get 100 percent.

I hope we derive a system for whatever national tests come, and I think some are likely to come that measure real knowledge and real progress, and that encourages States to make their own standards even tougher and their assessments to take place more frequently.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time allotted to the Senator has expired.

Mr. GORTON. I ask for two additional minutes.

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

Mr. GORTON. I would just like to say in summary that I am in no way critical of what my State has done, and the movement towards these standards I find very encouraging. I think absent these constructive criticisms that they are likely to set very, very good and very significant standards. It is just that I have to predicate the comment that we shouldn't be discouraged by the results. We should be discouraged by the results. And we should resolve that we are going to do everything possible to cause those results to improve markedly and as quickly as possible.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, if I may ask the Senator to yield for one additional question, I come from a school where I was involved in a graduating class of nine. I come from a county that has 3,000 people. The community in which I grew up has 300 citizens. My high school class was a class of nine. That school district was educating the children in my school to go out into the workplace and to do things with the kind of background they gave us in a different time. And that school district still exists, and the school still exists. It is still a very small school. But now those children that are being educated in that school are going out into the marketplace in a different era. We are now involved in much different kinds of global competition in which we are competing against kids in Germany and Japan who are going to school 240 days a year. Our kids are going to school 180 days a year competing with respect to jobs and economic

opportunity. And it is a much different world. That ought not suggest that we manage in any way our schools differently. The control and the authority and the payment for the schools ought to come from local government and local school districts and State governments.

But the point that is made by the people in the technology area, by the chamber of commerce and elsewhere, is that we are involved in global competition, and our education system must produce the quality of education that meets that competition in order for this country to succeed and to achieve what we want to achieve in the future.

That is why it is important for us to be discussing these issues. What are we getting for our education dollar? And are we achieving with our children proficient levels of mathematics in the fourth grade and education in the eighth grade, and how do we measure that?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time allotted to the Senator from Washington has expired.

Mr. DORGAN. I thank the Senator from Washington for yielding.

Mr. GORTON. I thank the Senator from North Dakota for his thoughtful comments, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. RES. 120

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I ask unanimous consent that at 12 noon today, the Senate proceed to the consideration of a resolution regarding Mother Teresa that was submitted today by Senators NICKLES, LOTT, and DASCHLE. I further ask unanimous consent that there be 30 minutes of debate equally divided in the usual form. I finally ask unanimous consent that at the hour of 2:15 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to a vote on the adoption of the resolution with no intervening action or debate. This resolution has been cleared by the minority leader.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 1061, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1061) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and

Human Services, and Education and related agencies for fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes.

The Senate resumed consideration of the bill.

Pending:

Gregg amendment No. 1070, to prohibit the use of funds for national testing in reading and mathematics, with certain exceptions.

Coats-Gregg amendment No. 1071 (to Amendment No. 1070), to prohibit the development, planning, implementation, or administration of any national testing program in reading or mathematics unless the program is specifically authorized by Federal statute.

Nickles-Jeffords amendment No. 1081, to limit the use of taxpayer funds for any future International Brotherhood of Teamsters leadership election.

Craig-Jeffords amendment No. 1083 (to Amendment No. 1081), in the nature of a substitute.

Durbin amendment No. 1078, to repeal the tobacco industry settlement credit contained in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

Durbin amendment No. 1085, to provide for the conduct of a study concerning efforts to improve organ and tissue procurement at hospitals, and require a report to Congress on the study.

Durbin (for Levin) amendment No. 1086, to express the sense of the Senate that hospitals that have significant donor potential shall take reasonable steps to assure a skilled and sensitive request for organ donation to eligible families.

Mack-Graham amendment No. 1090, to increase the appropriations for the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Fine Arts Center.

McCain-Graham amendment No. 1091, to eliminate Medicare incentive payments under plans for voluntary reduction in the number of residents.

McCain-Kerry amendment No. 1092, to ensure that payments to certain persons captured and interned by North Vietnam are not considered income or resources in determining eligibility for, or the amount of benefits under, a program or State plan under title XVI or XIX of the Social Security Act.

Craig-Bingaman amendment No. 1093, to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to adjust the maximum hour exemption for agricultural employees.

Landrieu amendment No. 1095, to increase funds to promote adoption opportunities.

Coverdell amendment No. 1097, to enhance food safety for children through preventative research and medical treatment.

Coverdell amendment No. 1098 (to Amendment No. 1097), in the nature of a substitute.

Specter (for Nickles) amendment No. 1109, to require that estimates of certain employer contributions be included in an individual's social security account statement.

Specter amendment No. 1110, to reduce unemployment insurance service administrative expenses to offset costs of administering a welfare-to-work jobs initiative.

Specter amendment No. 1111, to provide start-up funding for the National Bi-partisan Commission on the Future of Medicare.

Harkin (for Wellstone) amendment No. 1087, to increase funding for the Head Start Act.

Harkin (for Wellstone) amendment No. 1088, to increase funding for Federal Pell Grants.

Harkin (for Wellstone) amendment No. 1089, to increase funding for the Education Infrastructure Act of 1994.

Harkin-Bingaman-Kennedy amendment No. 1115, to authorize the National Assessment Governing Board to develop policy for voluntary national tests in reading and mathematics.