

the community to continue to do that after age 3 all the way up to the time they enter school. Today, those children may be provided one service here and one service here and one service here. When they get to age 3, they suddenly have to go into a certain preschool program. This gives more parents more choices, more flexibility, and it is a great advantage.

One very important aspect of the bill—it is the first thing I mentioned—is the definition of highly qualified teacher. This may not sound very important to people who aren't teachers with special needs children, but this has been a source of a lot of anxiety for teachers.

In elementary schools, in early grades, teachers teach a lot of subjects. If you are certified to be an elementary school special needs teacher, then you can be a highly qualified teacher. But when you get to the middle school and high school level, you will be teaching special needs children in math, science, English, history, and geography. The original legislation said a special needs teacher in Shawnee, KS, or Fort Dodge, KS would have to be qualified in special needs in English, in math, in science, history, and geography. That is quite a burden for a special needs teacher in high school in some districts. This legislation creates some flexibility. It creates a way for States to look at this in a practical way, and says in middle schools and high schools across this country when teachers are teaching special needs children, we are going to come up with a commonsense way to make sure they are highly qualified because these children deserve that, too, but to take into account the reality. We are talking about maybe 100,000 teachers in the middle and high schools, maybe 15,000 or 20,000 schools.

We have to be careful when we write a sentence about elementary and secondary education in America. We are not the national school board, or at least we shouldn't be. We need to make sure it is practical and realistic and gives as much flexibility as possible to communities and States to come up with what actually works with an individual child in an individual classroom. This is one disappointment I have with the bill.

Senator SESSIONS from Alabama and I tried to change the effective date of the definition of a highly qualified teacher for middle and high school. We said it ought to be a year from now. But the majority felt this new requirement should go into effect in August of next year, which is 6 or 7 months from now. I think that is a mistake.

What has to happen is the President has to sign this bill in December. Then the U.S. Department of Education has to interpret its regulations—that is January or February. Then the States have to come up with their new, flexible ways of determining what “highly qualified teacher” is. Then the teachers have to read it. They have to per-

haps do some professional development. They have to become certified. And all of this has to be done by July or August.

This is the kind of thing that does not build support for the No Child Left Behind Act. I think it very important that we remember while we may have a very good idea, we are not a national school board of the small school districts. This is a massive country with many different parts to it. We are dealing in this case with probably 100,000 teachers.

Overall, this is a very important bill and I am delighted to be a part of it. I commend especially Senators GREGG and KENNEDY for their leadership.

THE AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVICS EDUCATION ACT OF 2004

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I wish to discuss H.R. 5360, the American History and Civics Act of 2004.

I support H.R. 5360, the American History and Civics Education Act of 2004. The bill represents an important step forward in the teaching of these critical subjects. The Senate acted last year on an earlier version of this bill that I sponsored along with the Senator from Nevada, Mr. REID. I introduced that bill in my Maiden Speech before the Senate, and we later voted 90-0 in support of its passage. The House has now passed its version of the bill, under the leadership of Congressman ROGER WICKER from Mississippi. Senate passage of the bill today will be the culmination of nearly two years of work on this important piece of legislation.

National exams show that three-quarters of the nation's 4th, 8th and 12th graders are not proficient in civics knowledge and one-third does not even have basic knowledge, making them “civic illiterates.”

Children are not learning about American history and civics because they are not being taught it. American history has been watered down, and civics is too often dropped from the curriculum entirely.

It is time to put the teaching of American history and civics back in its rightful place in our schools so our children can grow up learning what it means to be an American. This act does precisely that. It establishes Presidential Academies for Teachers of American History and Civics and Congressional Academies for Students of American History and Civics. Their purpose would be to inspire better teaching and more learning of our history and way of government. The Secretary of Education is authorized to provide grants to universities, libraries, museums, or other non-profits that demonstrate expertise in the core subjects of history and civics and government. For example, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, which operates and maintains the home of our first President, might apply to host an academy at their historical site, focusing

on the history of the founding of our nation and the principles upon which it was founded.

Additionally, the bill allows the Secretary of Education to provide grants to the National History Day program, a year-long national program that trains teachers and sponsors a national competition among junior high and high school students, who produce dramatic performances, imaginative exhibits, multimedia documentaries and research papers based on research related to an annual theme.

I want to extend my gratitude to the Senators who have supported the bill here in the Senate: Senators FRIST, REID, GREGG, KENNEDY, STEVENS, and BYRD, among many others. And I want to thank our colleagues in the House who worked so hard on the bill, including Congressmen BOEHNER, MILLER, CASTLE, WOOLSEY, BLACKBURN, and especially Congressman WICKER who was the lead sponsor.

A strong, bipartisan team of players stood up for the future of our children and this nation by working on this legislation. With Senate passage, today is a great victory for everyone working to improve the teaching of American history and civics so our children can grow up learning what it means to be an American.

This bill will be coming, hopefully, before the Senate later today. It passed the Senate unanimously last year. Now it has passed the House and is coming back in an amended and improved version. I believe it has full support. The lead sponsor is the new Democratic leader of the Senate, HARRY REID. It is also sponsored by Senator KENNEDY and Senator BYRD, who testified for the bill. Most of the Republican Senators have cosponsored it.

This is a bill very simply to put teaching of American history and civics back into its rightful place—in schools where our children can grow up learning what it means to become an American.

It takes a modest step to establish Presidential Academies for Teachers of American History and Civics in the summer and the Congressional Academies for Students of American History and Civics. They are modeled after the very successful Governor's Schools that are in many States across the country where students and sometimes teachers go for 2 weeks or 4 weeks to learn particular subjects.

The reason for it is that high school seniors in the United States make the lowest scores of any subject on U.S. history. The lowest scores of any subject, according to the National Assessment for Educational Progress of America, for high school seniors are on U.S. history. That is absolutely disgraceful.

Here we are a nation at war, our principles are being attacked, and we are not teaching our children those principles. Here we are a nation that celebrates itself for being one for many with more new Americans coming than

ever in our history, and we are not teaching what it means to be an American.

You don't get to be an American by the color of your skin or where you come from. You get to be an American by understanding what we believe in. The common school itself was created 150 years ago, according to the late president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker. He said the public school was created to help immigrant children learn the three Rs, and what it means to be an American, with a hope they would go home and teach their parents. The civic purpose of the public school is being fundamentally ignored in many parts of our country and this is one small step in that direction.

I am delighted that a bipartisan group of Senators and House Members—Mr. BOEHNER, Mr. MILLER, Representative BLACKBURN from Tennessee, and the principal sponsor, ROGER WICKER of Mississippi—played a role. I thank them for that.

AMERICAN BALD EAGLE COMMEMORATIVE COIN ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I mention one other piece of legislation that may have a chance of passing. At least I can report there are now 68 U.S. Senators who have agreed to sponsor S. 2889 which will celebrate the recovery and restoration of the American bald eagle by making \$5- and \$10- and 50-cent commemorative coins.

Very often these so called coin bills are especially parochial. That is why we are required to have 67 Senators agree before we do one; usually by practice, nearly 300 House Members. Well, 300 House Members have agreed and nearly 70 Senators. That is because in 1782 the Founding Fathers established the bald eagle as the national emblem of the United States. Since then, the bald eagle has come to represent the spirit of American freedom, democracy, and strength.

It is my hope before we finish our business today we will honor and protect the symbol of America and cosponsor and enact the American Bald Eagle Commemorative Coin Act.

One reason Senators have signed on is that the eagle has been roaming the Halls with its handler, going into different offices. A number of Senators have called me from their office with the eagle perched in front of them. The eagle is a very successful lobbyist for himself.

If we cannot get the commemorative coin enacted today before we adjourn, I am sure we will be able to do so early next year.

I thank the Senator from Minnesota and the Senator from Ohio for giving me an opportunity to conclude my remarks.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The distinguished Senator from Minnesota is recognized on this glorious Saturday afternoon.

HELPING A VETERAN FAMILY WITH AIDS

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I had the great pleasure of sitting in the Presiding Officer's chair yesterday when one of our colleagues said goodbye, the distinguished minority leader. It was a very stirring and moving speech about what this institution is all about.

I sat in the Senate when the senior Senator from Oklahoma said goodbye after 20-something years in this institution. I was in the chair when the candidate for the Vice President of the United States said goodbye after serving one term in this institution.

It is pretty humbling, to understand how incredible it is to be part of this body and all the things that one can do.

I am standing right now to say thank you to a Member who is still serving, who I hope will serve for a long time, the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BOND. Sometimes we wait until folks leave until we express our deep appreciation for all they do and all they have accomplished. For me, I feel moved to do this for a little act of kindness, of help he gave some constituents of mine.

In the Omnibus bill we will vote on, hopefully, sometime this afternoon, there is \$388 billion laid out to be spent in that bill. The very last item of the 133 pages of the section that appropriates funds for the Veterans Administration and HUD, had to do with two individuals from Minnesota, Brian and Eric Simon, to receive \$200,000, to be split between them. That constitutes 1/20,000th of 1 percent of the allocations in that bill, but to those young men it is so important. Let me tell a little story about why it is important and who these young men are.

In 1983, Douglas Simon, the father of Brian and Eric Simon, served in the Army National Guard at Fort Benning, GA. He was injured. He required emergency medical surgery. Mr. Simon's surgery was performed at Fort Benning, GA. As part of the surgery, a blood transfusion of nine units was required. The blood he received was not screened and contained the AIDS/HIV virus.

In 1984, Mr. Simon married Nancy and they had three children together, Brian, Eric, and Candace. Before the virus took their lives, and ultimately the lives of Candace, the daughter, and the mom Nancy, the Simons were a smalltown American family: hopeful, conventional, meat and potatoes, church every Sunday, Roman Catholic family with a Virgin Mary statute in the front yard. Old Glory hung on the flagpole every clement day.

I am reading from and reflecting on an article written in 1994 about the Simons.

Doug and Nancy had met in high school. They got married after they graduated. He joined the Minnesota Army National Guard out of high school. He had an accident and underwent surgery. Nancy was older than a year by Doug and grew up close by, a

place called New Prague, MN, 1 of 11 children. She was quiet, timid.

When she and Doug first got married, they dreamed of having lots of kids. The oldest son is Brian. He was 10 in 1994 and he is 19 now. I got to know him. He was born before Doug and Nancy were infected. Eric escaped the virus, although he was born after Nancy had been infected.

They were just regular kids, lived a regular life, with a mom and a dad. They had a young sister, Candy. Candy was diagnosed with AIDS when she was 18 months old, in 1989. The doctors had treated her for a number of conditions. She had persistent diarrhea. She failed to thrive. She had countless CAT scans and blood tests. She learned how to push the plunger of a syringe as the myriad of medications increased. She went through a lot. She was, as her brothers tell me, a mischievous little girl, hamming it up, wearing Elton John-like oversized sunglasses, or a poster-child angel, always a mommy's girl.

Three months before preschool started, she complained about stomach pains. You know why it hurts? Because I have a bad tummy.

For her doctors, it was a little more puzzling than that, and x rays revealed spots on her colon the size of chicken pox. She suffered greatly. She suffered greatly. I almost tear up as I reflect on what this young girl went through. She died on June 25, wrapped in her mom's arms. She was a couple days shy of her sixth birthday. The mother also contracted AIDS and went through great pain and great suffering. Mom ultimately died of AIDS.

I got to know the family. My predecessor, Senator Wellstone, worked in trying to do something for them.

The VA provides health care to some 2,800 veterans who have contracted AIDS in the manner that Mr. Simon contracted AIDS. They provide disability compensation to veterans with AIDS and death and education benefits to the families of veterans who have succumbed to AIDS. In this respect, the VA treats AIDS like other service-connected health conditions.

But in an important way, AIDS is different. It is not like other connected services; it can be transmitted to the spouses and unborn children of servicemen. That is what happened here with Doug Simon. By law, the VA cannot provide any sort of benefits for illnesses contracted by these family members.

Last year, I introduced S. 1509, the Eric and Brian Simon Act. I thought it was a starting point to give a fair deal to veterans and their families with AIDS to provide a one-time \$100,000 benefit to veterans who receive AIDS as a result of a blood transfusion from the service-related injury. For spouses who contracted AIDS from contact with the infected veteran, and offspring of the veteran or spouse infected with AIDS at birth, in the event that the veteran or family member has already