in Medicare Advantage for people who are eligible for both. This program is called a special needs plan. It coordinates the care and the benefits between the Medicaid Program which is run by the States and the Federal Government. It should be seamless to the beneficiaries. Have these special needs plans worked perfectly? Not always. The program is a work in progress. Surely it is a lot better than what happens without it. Without it, health care for poor beneficiaries is siloed. The parts covered by Medicare are never coordinated with the parts Medicaid is responsible for.

Let's say a frail senior is in a nursing home. She has exhausted her savings so Medicaid is paying. She has Medicare for her health coverage. She enrolls in one of these special needs plans. When she gets a fever or an infection, the Medicare Advantage special needs plan can treat her at the nursing home. In the original Medicare, the nursing home would send her to the more expensive hospital environment. The hospital, after 3 days, would discharge her to a skilled nursing home facility. For her, the Medicare Advantage plan reduces disruptions and keeps her from being exposed to additional infections in the hospital. At the same time, you save a lot of money in Medicare. Both she and Medicare are spared the cost of hospitalization—the most expensive health delivery.

So the critics who say that Medicare Advantage is not helping poor people are mistaken. While the program is small, that is because the program is new. It can be a model for all of us. This is how we want our care to be delivered to us when we are very old and when we are very frail.

So Medicare Advantage can be a good choice for very sick people. It can be a good choice for people with chronic illness. It can be a good choice for lower income people. It can be a good choice for people who want some extra benefits. It can be a good choice for people on fixed incomes. It can be a good choice for rural beneficiaries as well as urban ones.

When the House of Representatives gets done with it all, we will not have it in rural America. But they will still have it in urban America, and that is very unfair. That inequity was meant to be taken care of when we passed the prescription drug bill in 2003, and I am not anxious to let that sort of equity between rural and urban America go away. But it can also be a good choice for seniors.

All Medicare beneficiaries, whether they live in a city, a small town, or on a farm, ought to be able to choose their own plan. They know best what suits their needs—the original 1964 Medicare or the 2003 Medicare Advantage plan. The House bill would gut the Medicare Advantage program. It would take these choices away from our beneficiaries. The Senate SCHIP bill avoids this.

I urge my colleagues to remember why we decided to give Medicare beneficiaries a choice of health plans. I urge my colleagues to reject efforts to cut Medicare Advantage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MENENDEZ). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, let me ask, through the Chair, the manager of the previous bill, is he finished with what he would like to do this evening? If I could ask the Senator from Iowa, does he need any more time on the subject he has been talking about? I will be glad to wait.

Mr. GRASSLEY. No. I am going home.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Congratulations.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I thank the Senator for listening to me.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Iowa.

AMERICA COMPETES ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, this evening the Senate unanimously passed a piece of legislation which we call the America COMPETES Act. Earlier today, the House of Representatives passed it by a vote of 367 to 57. So anyone watching the work of the U.S. Congress must think: Well, that must either be not very important or not very hard to do.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I would suggest that the America COMPETES Act will be as important as any piece of legislation the Congress passes in this session, and it has taken as much work as any piece of legislation that has been passed in this session.

I would like to spend a few minutes acknowledging the work and describing the importance of the bill, but I think the first thing to do is to say actually what the bill does. The point of the America COMPETES Act is very simple. It helps America keep its brainpower advantage so we can keep our jobs from going overseas to China and India and other countries.

The Presiding Officer is from a State that has benefitted greatly from America's brainpower advantage. There is a great deal of higher education and research in his State, and, as a result of that, a number of jobs. I have been in the Edison Museum in New Jersey, which is a good reminder of exactly what we are talking about.

Thomas Edison used to say he failed 10,000 times until he succeeded once. That one success was the lightbulb, and then a number of other inventions, which created millions of jobs in the United States.

The United States, this year, is producing about a third of all the money in the world. The International Monetary Fund says that almost 30 percent of all the wealth in the world is produced in our country, measured in terms of gross domestic product, for just 5 percent of the world's population. That is how many Americans there are.

So imagine if you are living in China or India or Ireland or any country in the world, and you are looking at the United States. It is not so hard to look at other countries today with the Internet and travel and television the way they are. Someone in one of those countries could say: How can those Americans be producing 30 percent of all the wealth for themselves when they are only 5 percent of the world's population? They have the same brains everybody else does. They cannot work any harder than anybody else does.

What is it? There are a variety of advantages we have in this country. But most people who look at this country, since World War II, believe our standard of living, our family incomes, our great wealth comes primarily from our technological advances, from the fact that it has been in this country that the automobile, the electric lightbulb, the television set, the Internet, Google have been invented. Or the pharmaceutical drugs that help cure disease all over the world, they also have come mostly from this country.

It is that innovation that has given us our standard of living and given the rest of the world a high standard of living. That brainpower advantage we have is located in some pretty obvious places. One place, of course, is our system of higher education, the great university system. We not only have many of the best universities in the world, we have almost all of them. Another place is in the great National Laboratories, from Oak Ridge National Laboratory to Los Alamos and across our country.

Another is in the great corporations of America where research is done whether it is in pharmaceuticals or whether it is in agriculture. Those great engines of research and innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit and free market that we have have given us this great advantage.

We, therefore, talk a lot about progrowth policies. What causes our economy to grow? We, on this side—we Republicans—talk a lot about low taxes. I believe that is important and vote that way. When I was Governor of Tennessee, we had the lowest tax rates in the country. But I found very quickly that low taxes by themselves do not create a high standard of living because we had the lowest taxes in our State but we also were the third poorest State. I also found that better schools and better research were the keys to better jobs. That is what this bill is about. So as a result of the America COMPETES Act, over the next few years, we will have done something pretty remarkable.

We asked the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Medicine, as well as other business leaders in our country, exactly what it would take to keep our brainpower advantage, and they have told us, and tonight we have done it. All that has to happen now is for the President of the United States to sign it, and I feel confident he will.

I hope what he does is sign it and take credit for a lot of it, because in his State of the Union Address President Bush emphasized the importance of this and talked about his American Competitiveness Initiative 2 years ago.

But this is what we have done. We have authorized the spending, over the next 3 years, of $43 billion to help keep our brainpower advantage by investing in science and technology. Most of that—and this was a part of the President's recommendation—helps to grow research at our major scientific laboratories and Departments by doubling their research budgets over a 7-year term. That would be the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Department of Energy Office of Science, which among other things, supervises the great National Laboratories in our country.

As I said, the act authorizes a total of $43.3 billion, over the next 3 fiscal years, for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics research and education programs across the Federal Government. It will help to prepare thousands of new teachers and provide current teachers with content and teaching skills in their area of education. It will establish an advanced research projects agency for energy—a nimble and semi-autonomous research agency at the Department of Energy—to engage in high-risk, high-reward energy research. This is modeled after what we call DARPA at the Department of Defense which produced stealth technology and the Internet. Perhaps we can do the same as we look for new energy technologies.

It expands programs at the National Science Foundation to enhance the undergraduate education of our future science and engineering workforce, including at our community colleges. There are many provisions in the bill to broaden participation in science and engineering fields at all levels.

There are new competitive grant programs to enable partnerships to implement courses of study in math, science, engineering, technology, and critical foreign languages. There are competitive grants to increase the number of math and science teachers serving high-need schools. The bill expands access to advanced placement courses and international baccalaureate courses by increasing the number of qualified teachers in high-need schools. In other words, in plain English, it will help more children, including those who come from families with less money, have a chance to take the advanced placement courses that will give them a route into college, high achievement, and the ability to produce jobs not just for themselves but for the rest of us.

It expands early-career research grant programs. It strengthens interagency planning for research infrastructure. It does all of this.

Now, one might say: Where did all these ideas come from? Did the Senator from New Jersey just wander in one day and say, ''I have a great idea. Let's stick it in''? Or did the Senator from Arkansas say, ''Well, we have a little program over at Little Rock that we all like, so let's have some money for it''? Or did the Senator from Tennessee say, ''I was down at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory yesterday, and someone gave me an idea, so let's have $10 million for that''?

That is not the way we did it. What we did is, 2 years ago, Senator BINGAMAN and I, and Representatives BART GORDON and Sherwood Boehlert of the House of Representatives—two Democrats and two Republicans—we literally went to the National Academy of Sciences and we asked this question: Tell us exactly what we need to do to keep our brainpower advantage, to keep our jobs from going to China and India? And they took us seriously.

The National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine appointed a distinguished committee of 21 Americans chaired by Norm Augustine, the former Chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin and a member of the National Academy of Engineering. On that committee were some of America's most distinguished business leaders, three Nobel laureates, the president emeritus of MIT, teachers, and others, who gave up their summer, reviewed hundreds of proposals, and, in priority order, told us the 20 things we needed to do to keep our brainpower advantage.

All of that was presented to us in a booklet called ''Rising Above the Gathering Storm,'' which is now well-known at universities, in schools, and in the business community as a wakeup call for the United States of America. It says we have been good—in fact, we have been way ahead of the rest of the line—but if we do not watch out, China, India, Ireland, England, and many of the other countries in the world, are going to catch up with us because there is no preordained right for Americans—no matter how bright we think we might be—to produce 30 percent of the world's wealth for just 5 percent of the people. Other people can do the very same thing in their colleges and universities, if they wish.

The members of this commission had countless stories to tell that every American who confronts these issues will find. Every Senator who travels to China sees they have recruited a distinguished professor of Chinese descent at an Ivy League university to come home and help improve a Chinese university. That is happening all over the world, and it is creating a much more competitive environment.

Last summer, Senator INOUYE and Senator STEVENS led a delegation of Senators to China. We were very well received because Senator STEVENS was the first to fly a cargo plane into Beijing in 1944 at the end of World War II. He was flying with the Flying Tigers. Senator INOUYE, of course, was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner in World War II. The Chinese remember well their affection for Americans in that war. So we were treated well and got to see President Hu, and the No. 2 man, Mr. Wu, the Chairman of the National People's Congress, for an hour each. These were interviews that many American delegations had not had before.

What was interesting to me was that in those sessions with the No. 1 and No. 2 man in China, where our conversations ranged from Iraq to Iran to North Korea to Taiwan, all the issues one might expect, the issue that animated the leaders of China the most was their efforts over the next 15 years to create an innovation economy. They wanted to talk about how China caught up with America's brain power advantage because they know their skills, they know they are good, they know they can do it and they did it in their way.

The month before, President Hu had walked over to the Great Hall of the People and assembled their National Academies of Science and Engineering and said: We are going on a 15-year innovation plan. We are going to invest 4 percent of our gross domestic product in research and technology. We are going to improve our colleges and our universities and our schools. We are going to create a brain power advantage for China that gives us a higher standard of living. They understand that.

We did it a little different way. Two years ago, we walked down to our National Academy of Sciences. We invited them to give us this report, ''Rising Above the Gathering Storm''. We took the recommendations of the Council on Competitiveness which was already working. The President of the United States gave his recommendations in his American Competitiveness Initiative. And then we went to work in the American way. We don't announce 15-year plans here; our way is a little messier. So we had to go through three committees here in the Senate and two in the House of Representatives.

I have to thank the senior Members of this body for the attitude they took toward this. For example, Senators STEVENS and INOUYE, Senators KENNEDY and ENZI, Senators DOMENICI and BINGAMAN, Democrats and Republicans who put aside 3,000 years of seniority and 200 jurisdictional prerogatives and said: Let's just work together and see if we can get this done across party lines. That is not very interesting to people across the country, all this inside baseball about how the Senate works. But it has to work in order for something such as this to happen.

It is not a simple thing to take the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences and actually do them in both bodies, and yet that is what we have done. Not only did we start 2 years ago, when this was a Republican Congress, but we passed this legislation during a Democratic Congress almost without missing a step.

What happened was a bill that was sponsored by the leaders—last time it was Frist and REID; now it is REID and MCCONNELL. They just changed the names because we had worked so well together—not only with ourselves but also with the Bush administration—that it was hard to tell whose bill it was.

At one time, this legislation that Senator DOMENICI and Senator BINGAMAN first introduced had 35 Republican cosponsors and 35 Democratic cosponsors, and the Speaker of the House NANCY PELOSI, when she was the Democratic leader, was one of the first out to support it. It is especially gratifying to me that Tennesseans, if I may say so, have taken such a role in it in the House of Representatives. Representative BART GORDON, who is now chairman of the Science Committee, was the lead conferee on this piece of legislation. Representative ZACH WAMP, who represents the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, gave I thought the best speech on the House floor today on the Republican side. So again, it was bipartisan.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD at the end of my remarks an overview of the conference report we passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See Exhibit 1.)

Mr. ALEXANDER. I mentioned a number of the Senators who had been so deeply involved in this. I mentioned the committee chairmen and the ranking members. But I would like to especially acknowledge the work of Senator JOHN ENSIGN of Nevada, who was especially effective in reminding Republicans that investments in research and technology and science is as progrowth as tax cuts. Senator ENSIGN was powerful on that subject. I believe it as strongly as he does. I believe he was more effective than I was. Senator HUTCHISON had been working with Senator BINGAMAN for years on advanced placement courses. Senator MIKULSKI was out front from the very beginning on this. There is an enormous list of Senators who made this happen.

There is also a long list of Democratic and Republican staff members who deserve thanks. The list is too long for me to read all those names tonight, but I ask unanimous consent that this list of staff members be printed in the RECORD following my remarks, with the thanks of all of us for their work.

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

(See Exhibit 2.)

Mr. ALEXANDER. I would like to especially thank Matt Sonnesyn who is sitting here beside me. When I was permitted to be on the faculty of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard at the time when the Senator from Arkansas's father was the Director of the Institute of Politics, Matt Sonnesyn was my course assistant. He came with me to my campaign, and then he came with me to the Senate. For the last 2 years, he has worked on this legislation with Senator BINGAMAN's staff and Senator ENSIGN's staff on this side—a tremendously effective staff group who has made this bill possible.

I see the Senator from Arkansas here, and I know he is going to close out in a few minutes, and I think I am coming toward the end of my remarks.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing two points—one about substance and one about process. I know the Senator from Arkansas and I have talked about this often. We are working together right now on a bipartisan project that has to do with the Iraq war. We believe there shouldn't be any partisan votes on the Iraq war. For example, we, Senator SALAZAR and I, are joined by 6 Republicans and 7 Democrats in cosponsoring legislation that would make the bipartisan Iraq Study Group the law of our country. If the Congress and the President would agree on this bill, we could send to our enemy and our troops and the world the message that as we go forward to wherever we go next in Iraq, we go together; we are united.

Each Tuesday we have a breakfast that Senator LIEBERMAN and I host—no staff, no media, no policy positions adopted—so that in the midst of all our team meetings among Republicans and Democrats, when we talk about what to do to each other, we can have a session where we build relationships and talk about how we move the country ahead. We have had as many as 40 Senators at those breakfasts.

It is important for the people of this country to know that we spend a lot of time working that way. We did tonight on the Children's Health Insurance bill with Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY working together in a bipartisan way. For 2 years, we have done that on legislation that goes straight to the heart of how we keep our jobs from going to China and India, which is what we passed tonight.

So the word I wish to say about process is that when the Senate tries and when we focus on big issues, we are perfectly capable of acting the way the rest of the country would hope we would act. We compromise on our differences and come up with a result that benefits family after family.

This legislation, the America COMPETES Act, will mean, for example, in my home State of Tennessee, opportunities for hundreds of math and science teachers and for thousands of students to go to summer academies and institutes of math and science. It will mean opportunities for thousands of students who now can't afford to take advanced placement courses in science and technology to be able to do so and for hundreds of teachers who aren't trained to teach those courses to have that training.

It will mean distinguished scientists will hold joint appointments at the University of Tennessee and Oak Ridge National Laboratory, for example. It will mean support for a residential high school for science and math, which we have wanted to do in our State ever since I was Governor 20 years ago but didn't feel like we had the money. Now other States have it, and this bill provides some support for such a school.

It will mean a steady growth over 7 years in research funding, new support for early-career research grants in science and technology, and more support for all those kinds of studies that create the jobs that will keep our standard of living. That is what it means for my State. It means the same for New Jersey, and it means the same for Arkansas. So that bipartisan consensus we have seen here happens more often than most Americans know, but it doesn't happen as often as it should.

So this has been a privilege for me to work, especially with Senator BINGAMAN and Senator DOMENICI on the committee that I was a part of, to help get this started with BART GORDON, my colleague from the House, the Democratic Congressman who is chairman of the Science Committee, and with all the other Senators. This is the kind of thing I hoped to do when I came to the Senate. I think each of us hopes when we come here to get up every day and do a little something constructive and then go home at night and come back the next day and see if we can find something more to do along that way. If all of us participate in that way in other big issues, as we have in this, the America COMPETES bill, the Senate will be a stronger institution and the country will be a better country.

So I thank my colleagues for their support and for the time tonight. I thank the Senator from Arkansas for staying late so I can make these remarks. This legislation, the America COMPETES Act which passed the House today overwhelmingly and passed the Senate unanimously, is at least as important as any piece of legislation that passes in these 2 years because we have accepted the advice of the wisest men and women in our country about what we ought to do to keep our brain power advantage so we can keep our jobs.

The President has done a big part of it. I am sure he will sign it. I hope he takes some credit because he deserves it. There is plenty of credit to go around. I think the country will be glad we acted.

I yield the floor.

EXHIBIT 1

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2272, THE AMERICA CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO MEANINGFULLY PROMOTE EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY, EDUCATION, AND SCIENCE ACT (COMPETES)

Earlier this year, both the U.S. House and Senate passed comprehensive legislation (H.R. 2272, S. 761) to ensure our nation's competitive position in the world through improvements to math and science education and a strong commitment to research.

The Conference Agreement follows through on a commitment to ensure U.S. students,

teachers, businesses and workers are prepared to continue leading the world in innovation, research and technology—well into the future.

In summary, the Conference Agreement:

Keeps research programs at National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science on a near-term doubling path;

Authorizes a total of $43.3 billion over fiscal years 2008–2010 for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research and education programs across the federal government;

Helps to prepare thousands of new teachers and provide current teachers with content and teaching skills in their area of education through NSF's Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program and Math and Science Partnerships Program;

Creates the Technology Innovation Program (TIP) at NIST (replacing the existing Advanced Technology Program or ATP) to fund high-risk, high-reward, pre-competitive technology development with high potential for public benefit;

Establishes an Advanced Research Projects Agency for Energy (ARPA–E), a nimble and semiautonomous research agency at the Department of Energy to engage in high-risk, high reward energy research;

Expands programs at NSF to enhance the undergraduate education of the future science and engineering workforce, including at 2-year colleges;

Includes provisions throughout the bill to help broaden participation in science and engineering fields at all levels;

Authorizes two new competitive grant programs that will enable partnerships to implement courses of study in mathematics, science, engineering, technology or critical foreign languages in ways that lead to a baccalaureate degree with concurrent teacher certification;

Authorizes competitive grants to increase the number of teachers serving high-need schools and expand access to AP and IB classes and to increase the number of qualified AP and IB teachers in high-need schools;

Expands early career grant programs and provides additional support for outstanding young investigators at both NSF and DOE; and

Strengthens interagency planning and coordination for research infrastructure and information technology (i.e. high-speed computing).

Following are more detailed summaries of the conference agreement's eight titles:

TITLE I—OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY (OSTP)/GOVERNMENT WIDE SCIENCE

The conference agreement directs the President to convene a National Science and Technology Summit to examine the health and direction of the U.S. STEM enterprises; requires a National Academy of Sciences study on barriers to innovation; changes the National Technology Medal to the National Technology and Innovation Medal; establishes a President's Council on Innovation and Competitiveness (akin to the President's Council on Science and Technology); requires prioritization of planning for major research facilities and instrumentation nationwide through the National Science and Technology Council; and expresses a sense of Congress that each federal research agency should support and promote innovation through funding for high-risk, high-reward research.

TITLE II—NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

The conference agreement establishes the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a full participant in all interagency activities to promote competitiveness and innovation and to enhance science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. The agreement also affirms the importance of NASA's aeronautics program to innovation and to the competitiveness of the United States. It urges NASA to implement a program to address aging workforce issues at NASA and to utilize NASA's existing Undergraduate Student Research program to support basic research by undergraduates on subjects of relevance to NASA. Finally, the conference agreement expresses the sense of Congress that the International Space Station (ISS) National Laboratory offers unique opportunities for educational activities and provides a unique resource for research and development in science, technology, and engineering which can enhance the global competitiveness of the U.S.

TITLE III—NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY

The conference agreement authorizes a total of $2.652 billion over fiscal years 2008–2010 for NIST. This includes funds for the NIST labs, for lab construction, the TIP program, and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Program: This funding level keeps the NIST labs on a path to doubling in ten years.

The conference agreement funds the NIST Labs at $502.1 million for FY08 and increases the funding by 8% per year (10-year doubling), which result in $541.9 million in FY09 and $584.8 million in FY10. The conferenqe agreement provides $150.9 million in FY08 for lab construction. This funding is reduced in each of the next two fiscal years, with funding provided at $86.4 million in FY09 and $49.7 million FY10. These out-year funding levels will allow the completion of construction projects at NIST's Boulder, CO and Gaithersburg, MD facilities. The MEP program is funded at $110 million in FY08, $122 million in FY09 and $131.8 million FY10.

The conference agreement creates a new initiative, the Technology Innovation Program (TIP) which is based on the proven success of the Advanced Technology Program (ATP), but better reflects global innovation competition by funding high-risk, high-reward, pre-competitive technology develoment, focusing on small- and medium-sized companies. The TIP allows for greater industry input in the operation of the program, allows university participation for the first time, and firmly focuses the program on small- and medium-sized high-tech firms.

TIP will replace ATP and bridge the funding gap between the research lab and the marketplace. The conference agreement provides an authorization of $100 million FY08, $131.5 million FY09 nd $140.5 million in FY10. These funding levels will allow for a viable program, with approximately $40 million per year for new awards.

The agreement includes language to clarify that the focus of TIP is to support, promote and accelerate innovation in the U.S. through high-risk, high-reward research in areas of critical national need. It specifies that large companies may not receive any TIP funding.

Further, it provides a list of award criteria to ensure that the proposed technology has a strong potential to address critical national needs through transforming the nation's capacity to deal with major societal challenges that are not currently being addressed; that the applicant provides evidence that the research will not be conducted within a reasonable time period without TIP assistance; that reasonable efforts were made by the applicant to secure funding from alternative sources and that no other alternative funding sources were reasonably available; and that other entities have not already developed, commercialized, marketed, distributed or sold similar technologies. In addition, the NIST Director shall issue an annual report on the program's activities. TIP may accept funds from other federal agencies, and these funds will be included as part of the federal cost share of any TIP project.

TITLE IV—NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

The conference agreement establishes a coordinated ocean, Great Lakes, coastal and atmospheric research and development program for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration NOAA) in consultation with NSF and NASA. In addition, NOAA is required to build upon existing educational programs and activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of the ocean, Great Lakes, and atmospheric science. As a result, a science education plan is to be developed that would set forth the goals and strategies for NOAA, and be reevaluated and updated every 5 years. NOAA would also be recognized for their historic contributions to the innovation and competitiveness of this country, as well as be recognized as a full participant in interagency efforts to promote innovation and competitiveness.

TITLE V—DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

The conference agreement provides nearly $17 billion to Department of Energy (DOE) programs over fiscal years 2008–2010, keeping Office of Science on a seven-year doubling path and establishes an Advanced Research Projects Agency for Energy, or ARPA-E.

ARPA-E will address long-term and high-risk technological barriers in energy through collaborative research and development that private industry or the DOE are not likely to undertake alone. Because of its autonomy within DOE, and the flexibility and resources afforded to its technical personnel, ARPA-E is structured to respond very quickly to energy research challenges, as well as terminate or restructure programs just as quickly. A fund is established in the U.S. Treasury separate and distinct from DOE appropriations, as will be the budget request for ARPA-E. With this separate fund, ARPA-E will be independent of the DOE bureaucracy, and likewise should not operate at the expense of other programs at DOE, particularly the Office of Science. The conference agreement authorizes $300,000,000 in FY 2008, and such sums as are necessary thereafter for fiscal years 2009 and 2010.

As the nation's largest supporter of the physical sciences, the DOE Office of Science funds basic research and world-class facilities that play an integral role in the effort to maintain the technological competitiveness of the U.S. The conference agreement contains an authorization for the Office of Science which extends the 7 year doubling track prescribed in Energy Policy Act of 2005 by authorizing Fiscal Year 2010 at a funding level of $5.8 billion.

The conference agreement provides $150 million for K–12 science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education programs that capitalize on the unique scientific and engineering resources of the national laboratories. These programs include a pilot program of grants to states to help establish or expand statewide specialty high schools in STEM education; a program to provide internship opportunities for middle and high-school students at the national labs, with priority given to students from high-needs schools; a program at each national lab to help establish a Center of Excellence in STEM education in at least one high-need public secondary school in each lab region in order to develop and disseminate best practices in STEM education; and

a program to establish or expand summer institutes at the national labs and partner universities in order to improve the STEM content knowledge of K–12 teachers throughout the country.

All of these programs would be coordinated by a newly appointed Director for STEM Education at the Department, who would also serve as an interagency liaison for K–12 STEM education. In keeping with ongoing efforts to improve coordination and evaluation of K–12 STEM education programs across the federal government, all of the programs authorized in this conference agreement require evaluation and reporting of program impact.

In addition, the conference agreement highlights the critical role of young investigators working in areas relevant to the mission of DOE by establishing an early career grant program for scientists at both universities and the national labs; and a graduate research fellowship program for outstanding graduate students in these fields. The agreement also brings attention to research and education needs in the nuclear sciences and hydrocarbon systems sciences by establishing programs of grants to Universities to establish or expand degree programs in these areas.

Finally, the conference agreement helps DOE recruit distinguished scientists to the national labs and foster collaboration between universities and the labs by providing competitive grants to support joint appointments between the two.

TITLE VI—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

To enhance teacher education in the STEM fields and critical foreign languages, the conference agreement authorizes two new competitive grant programs. The programs will specifically enable partnerships to implement courses of study in STEM fields and critical foreign language that lead to a baccalaureate degree with concurrent teacher certification and at the graduate level the conference agreement implements 2- or 3-year part-time master's degree programs in these areas for current teachers to improve their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. The conference bill authorizes $151,200,000 for the baccalaureate degree program and $125,000,000 for the master's degree program for fiscal year 2008 and the two succeeding fiscal years.

The conference agreement authorizes competitive grants to increase the number of highly qualified teachers serving high-need schools and expand access to AP and IB classes; as well as authorize the Secretary of Education to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to convene a national panel within a year after the enactment of this Act to identify promising practices in the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in elementary and secondary schools. It also authorizes appropriations of $65,000,000 for fiscal year 2008 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the two succeeding fiscal years.

The conference agreement authorizes new grant programs to enhance math education in elementary and middle school mathematics and provides grants to support the following activities to assist states to implement programs for secondary schools and in addition to other best practices and in-service training, the bill provides targeted help to low-income students who are struggling with mathematics. The conference agreement also authorizes a competitive grant program to increase the number of students studying critical foreign languages, starting in elementary school and continuing through postsecondary education programs.

The Secretary of Education is authorized to award competitive grants to states to promote better alignment of elementary and secondary education with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in academic credit-bearing coursework in institutions of higher education, in the 21st century workforce and in the Armed Forces. The Secretary is also authorized to award grants of $50,000 to three elementary and three secondary schools, with a high concentration of low-income students in each state, whose students demonstrate the largest improvement in mathematics and science.

TITLE VII—NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

The conference agreement provides $22 billion to the National Science Foundation (NSF) over fiscal years 2008–2010, putting it on a path to double in approximately 7 years. Particularly strong increases are provided in fiscal year 2008 for K–12 STEM education programs at NSF. These programs, including the Noyce Teacher Scholarship program and the Math and Science Partnerships program will help to prepare thousands of new STEM teachers and provide current teachers with content and pedagogical expertise in their area of teaching.

In addition to providing increased support for programs that address the earliest stages of the STEM workforce pipeline, the conference report will help create thousands of new STEM college grduates, including 2-year college graduates, through increased support for the STEM talent expansion (STEP) program and the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

For those STEM graduates who continue on the path toward academic careers, the conferece agreement provides critical support for young, innovative researchers by expanding the graduate research fellowships (GRF) and integrative graduate education and research traineeship (IGERT) programs, strengthening the early career grants (CAREER) program, and creating a new pilot program of seed grants for outstanding new investigators. Such programs have an additional benefit of helping to stimulate high-risk, high-reward research by identifying and taking a chance on the best and brightest young minds.

Finally, the conference agreement includes provisions throughout the bill to help broaden participation in STEM fields at all levels, from kindergarten students through academic researchers. These include several programs of outreach and mentoring for women and minorities, a request for a National Academy of Sciences report to identify barriers to and opportunities for increasing the number of underrepresented minorities in STEM fields, and an emphasis on inclusion of students and teachers from high-needs schools.

TITLE VIII—GENERAL PROVISIONS

The conference agreement includes several general provisions related to the purposes of the legislation, but unrelated to any of the agencies above.

Specifically, the agreement requires the Secretary of Commerce report to Congress on the feasibility, cost and potential benefits of establishing a program to collect and study data on export and import of services; expresses a Sense of the Senate that the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board should promulgate final regulations implementing the section of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act that are designed to reduce burdens on small businesses; directs the Government Accountability Office, after three years, to assess a representative sample of programs under this Act and make recommendations to ensure their effectiveness; expresses a Sense of the Senate that federal funds should not be provided to any organization or entity that advocates against a U.S. tax policy that is internationally competitive; directs a National Academy of Sciences study on the mechanisms and supports needed for an institution of higher education or non-profit organization to develop and maintain a program to provide free access to on-line educational content as part of a degree program, especially in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and foreign languages, without using federal funds; expresses a Sense of the Senate that deemed exports should safeguard U.S. national security and basic research and that the President and the Congress should consider the recommendations of the Deemed Exports Advisory Committee; and lastly, expresses a Sense of the Senate that U.S. decision-makers should take the necessary steps for the U.S. to reclaim the preeminent position in the global financial services marketplace.

DEMOCRATIC STAFF TO THANK

Jonathan Epstein (Bingaman).
Sam Fowler (Energy Committee).
Chan Lieu (Commerce).
Carmel Martin (HELP Committee).
Melanie Roberts (Bingaman).
Craig Robinson (Lieberman).
Roberto Rodriguez (HELP Committee).
Missy Rohrbach (HELP Committee).
Ilyse Schuman (HELP Committee).
Colleen Shogan (Lieberman).
Bob Simon (Energy).
Rachel Sotsky (Lieberman).
Jean Toal Eisen (Commerce).
Jason Unger (Reid).
Trudy Vincent (Bingaman).
Michael Yudin (Bingaman).

REPUBLICAN STAFF TO THANK

Jeff Bingham (Commerce).
Adam Briddell (HELP Committee).
Beth Buehlmann (HELP Committee).
Kathryn Clay (Energy).
David Cleary (HELP Committee).
Ann Clough (HELP Committee).
Hugh Derr (Commerce).
Floyd DesChamps (Commerce).
Lindsay Hunsicker (HELP Committee).
Libby Jarvis (McConnell).
Christine Kurth (Commerce).
Jason Mulvihill (Commerce).
Sharon Soderstrum (McConnell).
Matt Sonnesyn (Alexander).
Jack Wells (Alexander).

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, our increasingly global economy is creating numerous challenges for America's families nationwide. Across the country, hardworking citizens are being left behind. The value of their wages is declining, their cost of living is going up, and many of their jobs are being shipped overseas.

As a result, the Nation is falling behind in the world economy. Study after study tells us the answer is to invest more in education, research and innovation, if we hope to keep up with other countries whose economies are soaring.

We know that a sound education is more important than ever for today's youth to succeed. Yet studies show, for example, that 15-year-old U.S. students score below average in math and science compared to the youth of other industrial nations. In one study, our 15-year-olds ranked only 24th in math. High school and college graduation rates are also falling behind. Our college graduation rate today has now dropped below the average graduation rate for OECD countries.

We know that Federal investments in research lead to medical, scientific, and technology breakthroughs. But these investments have been shrinking as a share of the economy. In real terms, government spending for research has been flat. Since 1975, we have dropped from third to 15th in the production of scientists and engineers.

It is a serious problem and we can't just tinker at the margins. We have a responsibility to our people, our economy, our security, and our Nation to make the investments to achieve the progress we need in the years ahead.

The America COMPETES Act is a step in the right direction. It will help put America back on track.

It invests in research by doubling the support for research at the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation over the next 7 years, and will increase funding for the National Institute of Standards and Technology as well.

It invests in innovation by creating a President's Council on Innovation and Competitiveness to determine the most effective ways to create jobs and move our economy forward.

Above all, it will invest in education, especially in math and science, engineering, and technology from the elementary school through high school and beyond, in order to attract more young people to pursue careers in these fields in the years ahead.

The problem today is especially serious for our low-income and minority students. Teachers are the single most important factor in improving student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. One study found that having a high quality teacher for 5 years in a row can close the average 7th grade achievement gap in math between lower income and higher income children. Yet too often, low-income and minority students are taught by the least prepared, least experienced, and least qualified teachers. Math and science classes in high-poverty schools are much more likely to be taught by teachers who do not have a degree in their field.

We know what we need to do, and this bill will help us do it. We must make sure all students are getting the teachers they need and deserve in the subjects that matter most in the new economy.

This bill addresses the teacher challenge head on by taking strong steps to ensure that all children have access to a high quality teacher with strong content knowledge in math, science, engineering and technology—particularly in high need schools, where such teachers are needed most.

The bill expands the Robert Noyce Teacher Program of the National Science Foundation, NSF, by creating a new NSF teaching fellows program to prepare accomplished math, science, technology and engineering professionals to teach in high need schools. It also creates a master teaching fellows program to leverage the talents of the best teachers to improve instruction in high need schools. Teaching fellows in the program will receive annual salary supplements of $10,000 a year in exchange for a commitment to teach for at least 4 years in a high need school.

The bill also expands the Teacher Institutes for the 21st Century Program at NSF, which provides cutting-edge professional development programs throughout the school year and during the summer for teachers in high-need schools.

In addition, the bill supports impressive new programs in colleges and universities to prepare math, science, technology, engineering and foreign language teachers. These programs will combine bachelor's degrees with concurrent teacher certification in their subjects, and will create master's degree programs for teachers to improve their knowledge in these subjects and to encourage math and science professionals to go into teaching.

Too often today, elementary and secondary school standards are not aligned with the expectations of colleges and employers. In many cases, high school graduates are struggling to keep up in college and the workplace. Remedial education and lost earning potential costs the Nation $3.7 billion a year, because so many students are not adequately prepared for college when they leave high school.

Our bill will help States align their standards with the demands of the 21st century workplace. Grants to States to create P–16 Councils will bring the elementary and secondary schools, college, businesses, and the Armed Forces together to ensure that education standards are better aligned with the expectations of colleges, the workforce, and the military. This alignment is essential if we hope to remain internationally competitive. Support will also be available for new data systems in states to track students' achievement and help them graduate prepared to succeed.

The bill will help give students in low-income districts the same opportunities as those in wealthier districts to enroll and succeed in college preparatory classes by expanding access to advanced placement and international baccalaureate classes.

This bill invests as well in foreign language education, to ensure that students are exposed to foreign languages and cultures. More than 80 Federal agencies now use tens of thousands of employees with skills in 100 foreign languages, and our businesses need the same.

For students to become proficient in foreign languages, they need sustained study, beginning in the early grades. But only a third of students in grades 7 through 12 today and only 5 percent of elementary school students study a foreign language. The bill provides grants to colleges and local educational agencies to create partnerships for students from elementary school through college to study such languages.

Finally, the bill will encourage new interest in nuclear science. Massachusetts has long been a leader in this research. Of three dozen licensed research reactors in the United States, three are located in Massachusetts universities The University of Massachusetts in Lowell, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and MIT. These colleges will have an increasingly important role as nuclear science expands, and our bill will expand existing programs and establish new ones to meet the growing demand.

All of these programs and investments are designed to help prepare us to compete in the 21st century, but there is more we must do if we intend to keep our nation and our workforce truly competitive. Significant new investments are needed to expand opportunities for higher education. College is more important than ever today, but it is also more expensive than ever. In the Senate 2 weeks ago, we passed the largest increase in student aid since the G.I. bill, and I look forward to delivering that aid for low-income students as quickly as possible.

We must also address the increasingly demanding impact of the global economy on American workers and their families. Our hard-working men and women deserve greater job security today and greater job opportunities in the future.

This bill puts first things first. Increased investments in education, research, and innovation are indispensable to our success as a nation. We have done it before and we must do it again. Let's begin with this bill.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President. I want to add my thanks and congratulations to the conference leaders and the dedicated staff for completing the negotiations on the America Competes Act. This legislation is an important investment in our Nation's strategy to promote competitiveness. It is a bipartisan package with broad support, based on the National Academy of Sciences report known as The Gathering Storm. Many members deserve our thanks and praise, and the report is a strong example that Congress can come together to develop comprehensive public policy.

America Competes is a comprehensive package that includes major sections covering math and science research and education initiatives. I am particularly pleased and proud that the legislation will reauthorize the National Science Foundation, NSF, at $22 billion from fiscal 2008 to fiscal 2010, to support several grant programs intended to encourage more students to teach math and science, as well as grants for college and graduate student science research. I have worked long and hard on programs within NSF. This bill supports the principle that the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, EPSCoR, increases in proportion with the overall budget of NSF. Earlier this year, I introduced a bipartisan bill, S. 753, the

EPSCoR Research and Competitiveness Act of 2007 which makes a similar recommendation. In my view, if our country seeks to broadly promote competitiveness, every state needs to be part of the effort. The EPSCoR program helps enhance the competitiveness of the 24 States, including West Virginia, that have historically not received as many NSF grants. The NSF continues its strong, peer-reviewed, merit-based competitive grants, but underserved States get support to achieve NSF's high standards.

EPSCoR is an essential part of our national competitiveness strategy. Our country will not do as well if only half of our States are competitive. It is also important to recognize that the EPSCoR States are home to 20 percent of the population and 25 percent of doctoral and research universities. Our States host 18 percent of academic scientists and engineers, and their institutions train nearly 20 percent of science and engineering graduate students. Even more interesting is the fact that 7 of the top 10 energy producing States are EPSCoR States. To be competitive, we must continue to invest in the EPSCoR program and our EPSCoR States for the long term. It is good for the States, but it is also a fundamental building block for our national policy. EPSCoR will enhance science and competitive which will help increase the number of scientists and engineers. It will encourage good science projects in States with unique aspects such as energy resources, proximity to our oceans, and other helpful scientific resources.

Two other programs that received generous support in the final package are the NSF's Math and Science Partnerships and the Noyce Scholarships. Both initiatives were including in the 2001 reauthorization of the National Science Foundation. Having sponsored legislation years ago to develop both programs, I am thrilled by current success of the programs in training teachers and recruiting top math and science majors into teaching. Expanding these programs will help improve math and science education which will be the cornerstone for our future competitiveness. This is a good investment for the future of West Virginia, and our entire country.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the America COMPETES Act. I applaud the bipartisan group that put together the America COMPETES Act, an extraordinary bill that will provide invaluable resources to ensure that the United States does not lose step with our global competitors.

We live in a global marketplace and if our students are to compete with students from around the world, they must have the benefit of a first rate math and science education taught by first rate math and science teachers. This new program will vastly improve the chance that our high school students are taught math and science by the best and the brightest.

That is why I am particularly proud of one provision that I authored that has been included in this conference agreement. This provision will establish a new program called the National Science Foundation Teaching Fellowship within the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program. I wish to express my deep gratitude to Senators KENNEDY, BINGAMAN, ALEXANDER and ENZI for including this important provision in the bill. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague, Senator CLINTON, for her valuable support.

The provision creating the NSF Teaching Fellowship is modeled on a bill I introduced last Congress, the Math and Science Teaching Corps Act. The Math and Science Teaching Corps was in turn modeled after a highly successful New York City program called Math for America.

Math for America's mission is to improve math education in our Nation's public schools by recruiting top math and science college graduates to become teachers and providing financial incentives to make these jobs competitive with the graduates' other opportunities.

The program has made tremendous strides. Over 100 teachers teach in nearly 60 New York City public schools. By 2011 the program will support at least 440 teachers. I can only hope that the new NSF Teaching Fellowship will be so successful.

The NSF Teaching Fellowship program is about paving the way for the future. It will ensure that leaders in math and science train the next generation of innovators—instead of leaving the classroom for research or other jobs. This model program is working in New York City, and now, with the America COMPETES legislation, it will be expanded to the rest of the country.

We need this program to reverse a dismal trend. Our students are not currently prepared to compete in a technology-intense economy. In the 2003 PISA math assessment that compared 15-year-old students across the world, American students ranked 24th out of the 29 participating countries—here in the U.S., in math, 24th out of 29. How can we compete when our students are falling behind?

A 2005 mathematics assessment of twelfth graders by the National Assessment of Education Progress found that 61 percent of high school seniors performed at or above the basic level, and 23 percent performed at or above the proficient level. For science, 54 percent of twelfth graders scored at or above the basic level. Eighteen percent performed at or above the proficient level. This is unacceptable.

Students currently studying math and science will be the fuel that powers our economy for the next century, and we must give them every chance to achieve, excel and thrive. The NSF Teaching Fellowship is a significant step.

Inspirational and brilliant teachers will make an enormous difference. To attract these role models, we need to level the playing field, and ensure that these future teachers can afford to teach. Only one-third of math teachers and less than two-thirds of science teachers majored or minored in the subject they teach. It is not hard to understand why. Starting salaries for math and science majors can be as much as $20,000 higher in the private sector than they are for public school teachers.

The NSF Teaching Fellowship will help reduce these barriers. The program's structure has a rigorous selection process and incentives built in to improve retention. NSF teaching fellows will have to take a test to prove their strengths in math or science. Then they enroll in a 1-year master's degree program in teaching that will give them teaching certification, and it is all paid for. They will agree to teach for at least 4 years, and for those 4 years, they will receive bonuses on top of their salaries. These individuals will infuse our schools with a deep passion for and an understanding of math and science and will share their knowledge with other teachers in their school.

To retain our current teachers who are outstanding at what they do and can provide expertise in the classroom that our teaching fellows won't yet have, there is another category called NSF master teaching fellows. Master fellows are current teachers who already have a master's degree in math or science education. They will also take a test demonstrating they have a high level understanding of their subject area. For the next 5 years they will serve as leaders in their school, providing mentorship for other teachers in their department as well as assisting with curriculum development and professional development. For these 5 years they also will receive bonuses on top of their salaries.

We all agree that every child deserves effective, high-quality professional teachers. And there are thousands of wonderful teachers in our country. But we need more. Without them, children will have difficulty reaching the high standards we want them to achieve. The federal government has long worked to ensure that all children have equal access to a quality education, no matter where they live. We must encourage and fund well-designed programs, such as the NSF Teaching Fellowship to incite rapid improvement in the quality of the Nation's future teaching workforce.

I urge all my colleagues to support this monumental bill, the America COMPETES Act.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the importance of supporting the conference report on the America COMPETES Act. This report represents a unique bipartisan, bicameral collaboration among three committees on the Senate side and our House counterparts to enhance American competitiveness in the 21st century global economy.

This conference report demonstrates that when we set partisan politics aside and work together, we can do great things for the American people. The core of this conference agreement is the Senate's America COMPETES Act, which was the product of bipartisan negotiations and input from the Members of the Senate Commerce, Energy, and Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committees. Work on this legislation began last year in response to the National Academy of Sciences report ''Rising Above the Gathering Storm,'' which was chaired by Norman Augustine, the ''Innovate America'' report, and the President's American Competitiveness Initiative. I want to thank all those who worked on this legislation for their hard work and dedication and commend them for the collegial manner in which this bill was crafted.

The focus of the programs in this bill is where it should be: on the knowledge and skills the American people need to have to be successful in the 21st century global economy. I am pleased we were able to keep education as one of the key priorities in this legislation. However, I have said consistently from the beginning that I wanted to hold programs to reasonable funding levels and to avoid duplication of programs. I think we could have gone further toward reducing duplication and overlap of programs, but this bill represents a strong bipartisan, bicameral effort and moves us in the right direction.

Why is this important? This year marks 50 years since Sputnik was launched. That launch sparked huge turmoil in this country and worry about the knowledge and skills necessary to keep our country safe and our economy growing and competitive. I was in junior high at the time. It was a shock to our Nation. Every one of us could recognize it—teachers, parents, and, probably as important, students, recognized it. Russia was beating us. They had put a satellite into orbit. It was hard to accept that we were behind. But it also brought out that American competitive spirit. We said they were not going to beat us. It launched a change in education such as we had not seen in the United States in decades, maybe centuries.

We were ultimately the winners of the space race, but it wasn't just a space race; it was an education race. It was the broad range of education that the United States delved into and the innovation that was brought about at the time that put us ahead of Russia.

Sputnik had a dramatic effect on our education system and made us recognize that a high school diploma was no longer just a nice thing to have. We could no longer rest on our past successes as a nation. We met the challenge of Sputnik through the National Defense Education Act. We looked to education as a path to continued success, and we supported an increase in the number of people who would continue their education beyond high school, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Today, we are again being challenged. In the 1950s, skilled jobs comprised 20 percent of the U.S. job market. In 2000, 85 percent of all U.S. jobs were categorized as skilled. For millions of Americans, access to an affordable college education is the key to their success in the 21st century global economy. The United States has one of the highest college enrollment rates but college completion rate is average to below average among developed countries in the world. Four out of every five jobs will require postsecondary education or the equivalent, yet only 52 percent of Americans over the age of 25 have achieved this level of education.

We have a huge challenge, not just in K–12 and higher education but in continuing education. It is estimated the average person leaving college will change careers 14 times. I didn't say ''change jobs'' 14 times, I said ''change careers'' 14 times. Of those 14 career changes, 10 of them don't even exist now. That is the pace at which things are accelerating.

So we are educating people for a level of jobs that do not exist at the present time. That is quite a challenge. Technology is demanding that everybody continue to learn and gain skills to remain competitive in the workplace. Learning is never over; school is never out. Those who do not get the knowledge and the capability to make the transfer to new careers will be left behind. We do not want that to happen. Education at all levels, including lifelong learning opportunities, is vital to ensuring that America retains its competitive edge in the global economy. Every American can and should be part of our Nation's success.

Because higher education is the on-ramp to success in the global economy, it is our responsibility to make sure everyone can access that on-ramp and reach their goals. This bill includes provisions that improve science, mathematics, and critical foreign language education in our Nation from elementary school through graduate school. It supports improvements to teacher preparation, establishes stronger links between graduate schools and employers, provides funding to support students trained at the doctoral level in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and enhances Federal programs that support students in graduate school.

The American system of higher education is renowned throughout the world. I can attest to that after having gone to India. I saw how their educational system works and how it is becoming very competitive with the United States. In India, only 7 percent of their children go on to higher education. That creates a very high level of competition among students to get into higher education. Despite the rigorous emphasis on science, mathematics, engineering and technology, however, India continues to send its graduate students to the United States because it is here that they learn creativity and innovation.

In most of the other countries around the world they learn the basics, can do excellent calculations and have a vast amount of rote knowledge. But what our colleges specialize in is teaching people to think, to come up with new ideas. To date, that is what has kept America ahead. However, the success story of American higher education is at risk of losing the qualities that made it great, which are competition, innovation, and access for all, if we do not invest in those core principles.

It is important to ensure that more students enroll in college prepared to learn and that more students have the support they need to complete college with the knowledge and skills to be successful. Slightly less than one-third—31 percent—of all public high school students are prepared for postsecondary education, as demonstrated by the academic courses they pursue. Well-prepared and well-supported students are more likely to persist to a degree completion and obtain the knowledge and skills they need.

If our students and workers are to have the best chance to succeed in life and employers to remain competitive, we must ensure that everyone has the opportunity to achieve academically and obtain the skills they need to succeed, regardless of their background. To accomplish this, we need to build, strengthen and maintain our educational pipeline, beginning in elementary school. We must also strengthen programs that encourage and enable citizens of all ages to enroll in postsecondary education institutions and obtain or improve their knowledge and skills. The decisions we make about education and workforce development will have a dramatic impact on the economy and our society for generations to come.

The America COMPETES Act is a good starting point, but we need to do more. Maintaining America's competitiveness requires that all students have the opportunity to continue to build their knowledge and skills. We need to find ways to encourage high school students to stay in school and prepare for and enter high-skill fields such as math, science, engineering, health, technology and critical foreign languages. For many, including those at the cutting-edge of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, acquiring a postsecondary education or training will be the key to their success.

Our Nation needs to make sure that every person has the opportunity to access quality education and training throughout their lives, which is why the America COMPETES bill is only the beginning. I remain committed to reauthorizing the Higher Education Act, the Head Start Act, and the Workforce Investment Act. In addition, we need to focus our efforts on taking

what we have learned from 5 years of experience to improve the No Child Left Behind Act. Together these laws form the path for success, so that every American can have the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the 21st century global economy, which is only going to become more competitive.

The call for education and skills training is loud and clear. Ingenuity, knowledge, and skills are a beacon for jobs; therefore, we must keep the beacon of innovation shining brightly on our shores. I ask my colleagues to support passage of the conference report on the America COMPETES Act and to work with me to move the companion education and workforce bills through Congress this year.

Mr. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise to express my support for the conference report on the America COMPETES Act, and I congratulate Senators BINGAMAN, ALEXANDER, DOMENICI, ENSIGN, KENNEDY, ENZI, INOUYE, STEVENS, and NELSON and their staff for their tireless and dedicated work to bring this vital and important legislation to final passage.

There is much in this legislation that will enable the United States to secure its leadership position in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and enhancing our competitiveness and capacity for innovation.

I am especially pleased that the conference report contains the language I included in the original Senate bill, reported last year by the Commerce Committee and eventually incorporated into S. 761, as passed by the Senate.

That provision directs that NASA be included in activities collectively referred to as the American Competitiveness Initiative, or ACI. This corrects what many of us believe was a serious oversight in the original announcement of the ACI, which failed to recognize the long-standing history of NASA's role in inspiring young people to pursue academic and professional careers in science and engineering.

The report also contains new language recognizing the potential contribution to education and competitiveness that can be made by the International Space Station National Laboratory and directs NASA to develop specific plans to realize that potential.

I look forward to working with Senator BILL NELSON, chairman of the Subcommittee on Space, Aeronautics and Related Sciences, in drafting reauthorization legislation for NASA next year, in which we can provide more specific authorization and guidance for NASA in fulfilling its important new role as part of the ACI.

This report also provides vital new authority to the Department of Energy, the Department of Education, the National Institute for Standards and Technology, NOAA, and the National Science Foundation to enable them to address the pressing national needs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and enhancing the Nation's competitiveness and innovation capabilities.

It is vital that the new provisions provided by this legislation are used as they are intended. This legislation includes generous new authority for appropriations for the Departments of Energy and Education and for NIST and the National Science Foundation. These additional spending limits are not provided to enable them to continue to do business as usual at an increased level of spending.

My single concern about the conference report is the action taken by the conference to modify section 7018. That provision, which was an amendment I offered during the markup of S. 1280, the original Senate Commerce Committee portion of what became S. 761 and was preserved in the conference chairman's mark considered in the conference, provided that the National Science Foundation take into account the degree to which proposed research contributed to the needs of innovation, competitiveness, the physical and natural sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics. At the same time, that provision included language—consistent with the recommendations of the report ''Rising Above the Gathering Storm''—that such prioritization not be used to inhibit investments in other important areas of research or scientific endeavor.

Despite that limitation, the conference adopted an amendment to that section which, essentially, includes virtually all research conducted by the NSF in the prioritization, including research that may or may not contribute to meeting the critical needs outlined in that report and which inspired the creation of this legislation. The awarding of such a ''blank check'' to NSF removes any assurance that the expanded authority and resources provided through this legislation will actually be used to carry out the purposes for which they have been granted.

While I am disappointed with this change, I am very much in favor of adopting the report. But as a member of the Commerce Subcommittee on Science and Innovation, and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, I will closely follow how the National Science Foundation implements the authority granted by this legislation.

By passing this report, Congress will have taken an extremely important and significant step toward meeting what are clearly and widely recognized as critical national needs. We cannot let that step be compromised by allowing a business-as-usual approach by the departments and agencies we are tasking to meet those needs.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating Senator ALEXANDER of Tennessee for his hard work and his great legislative success on this piece of legislation which passed the Senate tonight. I will just remark, if I may, that once again he has proven himself to be an effective leader and a thoughtful legislator. He is really the kind of Senators who is putting America first and trying to get great things done. And, obviously, you can tell by his speech that he is sharing credit with anybody and everybody.

We all know that it was Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER's hard work and dedication that made that legislation a reality.

BUDGET INFERNO

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I would like to take 10 minutes to talk about a situation that is happening in the West. I thank my colleagues for giving me that opportunity.

I spoke last week, and the background of my speech was this graph called a Budget Inferno. I was en route to Idaho to look at a fire complex known as the Murphy Fire Complex. That is now under control. In other words, a perimeter is around the fire. It happens to be 1,038 square miles of fire, nearly 700,000 acres, and $6.6 million spent. Type 1 teams, 2 of them; 24 crews, 1,230 personnel; 120 engines, 5 helicopters, 27 water tenders, and 10 dozers.

The firefighters who went in harm's way to work and stop this fire were gallant and I honor them. As I speak, there are literally thousands of young men and women out on the fire line in Idaho and Montana and parts of Nevada and elsewhere standing in harm's way to stop raging wildfires that are devastating the West.

This was the largest fire Idaho has had in literally decades. It is now the largest single fire this year in total acreage. Why did it happen? Is there a reason? Was it simply the hot weather or are there other reasons that are creating these huge infernos of wildfire across the West as we speak?

Last year, 10 million acres burned. This year, it appears we are on schedule to have an even greater fire season than we had last year. A month ago, I put a half a billion more dollars in the Interior appropriations budget to fight fire. My guess is when we get back in September, I and others will be on the floor asking for supplemental spending to pay for more wildfire devastation.

The good news, in the great tragedy of the Murphy Fire, was that no one was killed. There were four firefighters injured, there were hundreds of cattle burned up, hundreds of sheep, probably hundreds of wildlife that we simply do not know about.

But we have this huge area, some 600,000 acres that will be of no use to anyone, including cattle grazing, including wildlife, for a period of several years. It is totally burned out. I flew over it in a helicopter with our Governor and Senator CRAPO. None of us has ever experienced anything like that. You fly for half an hour at 100-plus miles an hour across a firescape, and all of it is black, the hilltops, the valleys, no trees, nothing left.