

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, INOUE, 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.

Here is what happened a few years ago. Here is what is happening now in the West. We ought to be doing something about it. Two years ago, there was a fire out there, 200,000 acres right in the same area. We rehabbed it. We grassed it, and the BLM said you cannot graze it for a couple of years now. Cattle might damage it.

Then there was another fire last year, 60,000 acres right beside it. We rehabbed it. We seeded it. You cannot graze it. At least that is what the scientists say. That is not what those who have lived out there for a hundred years say. We left it alone and the fuel built up.

Then we had someone sue us to protect the sage grouse habitat and the slickspot peppergrass, and a judge ruled. So we stopped grazing on half of that area, and the fuel built up.

Now, we are in a fire scenario, with temperatures in the West that we have never seen. So we had 3 weeks of 100-degree temperatures in the Boise Valley, and the dewpoint dropped to nearly zero. You know the rest of the story because I told you that story.

An unprecedented fuel buildup because a judge, and what I now call ecoterrorists, are destroying the landscape by not allowing reasonably managed, multiple-use approaches to our management. That is why the fire destroyed what it destroyed.

An unprecedented fuel loading is on the grasslands of our country. Now, because it is a little hotter, it is a little further into the summer, our timberlands are starting to burn. They, too, are loaded with fuel, and they will burn at unprecedented rates as they did last year and the year before and the year before that.

Here we are spending billions of dollars and destroying millions of acres of wildlife, watershed, wildlife habitat, all of those things combined. Our courts are saying: Get the people off the land, get the livestock off the land, rule in the favor of single-use management, here, there, and everywhere, tying the hands of our managers at the BLM and the Forest Service level, denying them the right to use their knowledge, use their scientific understanding for reasonable flexibility in the management we so desperately need.

That is the story of the Murphy Complex; that is the story of nearly 700,000 acres of total destruction; \$6.6 million, and by the time we are done rehabilitating it, it could go to nearly \$8 million.

Is there something we can do about it? Well, there will be interest groups who will rush back here, and in the name of the environment say do nothing—in the name of the environment.

Please, let us do something. Because the habitat the judge and the ecoactivists argued for to save the sage grouse and the slickspot peppergrass is no longer there. The enemy, some were the cattle that were grazing, they are no longer the enemy. The fire has become the enemy and that which they who ruled sought to save is now gone.

That story that I have related to you, whether it is played out in the Murphy Complex in Idaho and Nevada, or whether it is in Northern California, or whether it was in the Tahoe Basin this year, or whether it is in Eastern Oregon, or whether it is in the mountains of Idaho, will be played out and millions of acres will burn and billions of dollars will be spent and homes will be destroyed and we will say: Gee, I think we got a problem.

Congress will fail to respond and act to give our managers the flexibility, and we will continue to allow judges in the Ninth Circuit and environmental interests to game us and create these single, unique special kinds of management units that are impossible in any way to manage.

I wanted to relate to you this story. The State BLM director, our Governor, myself, and my colleague, Mike Crapo, flew over this devastation. In the terms of a cowboy who has lived out there all his life and his father before him and his father before him:

Senator, you ain't never seen anything like this one.

And, boy, we have not. The great tragedy is, more will come, and more is burning now. Several fires are burning in Idaho. We are already nearly over a million acres in my State alone. Yet our hands are tied by a bureaucracy that is strangled by court decision after court decision because Congress will not act in the name of the environment.

We have been scared into environmentalism instead of good and reasonable management. We are allowing our courts and our activist organizations to create the wildfire which has become a budget inferno.

So the reason I give this speech now is because we have entered the fire season. August is our fire season. September is our fire season. My guess is I will be returning as one of the members of the Appropriations Committee and the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee saying: Please, my colleagues, could we have a couple billion more dollars to fight these fires? Because we are burning up out there, and there is not much we seem to be able to do about it because we have decided to allow public land management to be turned over to the activists and the judges instead of the professionals.

Idaho burns tonight. Montana burns tonight. Nevada burns tonight, California, parts of Oregon, parts of Utah. I think it is important you hear this story and try to begin to understand that when we talk about balance and flexibility, you help us get there so we do not have to spend our budget in a useless and irresponsible way.

TRIBUTE TO ELIZABETH S. RUNNER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a respected Kentuckian, Mrs. Elizabeth S. Runner. On August 25, Mrs. Runner will turn 100 years old.

Mrs. Runner was born in Arkansas and moved to Warren County, KY, when she was just an infant. Her early years were not without struggle. She lost her father at the age of five, and her mother died during the flu epidemic that swept across the country in the early part of the last century. She was raised by her maternal grandmother.

At an early age, Mrs. Runner recognized the importance of a good education, and she pursued her passion for teaching. In 1925, she began her teaching career at Indian Creek, a one-room school in northern Warren County. She later transferred to the Richlandville School, where she taught until 1965. Over the course of her 40-year teaching career, she touched the lives of many Kentucky schoolchildren and their families.

In addition to being a devoted teacher, Mrs. Runner is a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She married J. Elvis Runner on June 28, 1930, and they were happily married until his passing in 1997. They raised two sons, Randall S. Runner and Phillip J. Runner. She has one granddaughter, Karen Elizabeth Runner, and two great-grandsons, Kory and Wren.

Mrs. Runner is a woman of faith and a founding member of the Rays Branch Church of Christ congregation. Kentuckians admire Mrs. Runner for her dedication to teaching, her family, her faith and her zest for life. I understand that Mrs. Runner's family and friends will gather on Sunday, August 26, to celebrate and honor her reaching the rare and marvelous milestone of a 100th birthday. I ask my colleagues to join me in sending Mrs. Runner well-wishes and congratulating her on her centenarian status.

AMERICA'S CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today in the wake of the terrible tragedy that began unfolding yesterday in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota.

As we all know by now, the bridge carrying Interstate 35W over the Mississippi River near downtown Minneapolis abruptly collapsed during yesterday evening's rush hour. At least 50 vehicles plunged 60 feet into the river. This morning, several people are confirmed dead, dozens of people are injured, and almost two dozen people remain missing. Sadly, first responders expect the death toll to rise as search and rescue missions continue today in earnest.

I would like to extend my thoughts and prayers to Senator COLEMAN, Senator KLOBUCHAR, and all those directly affected by this tragedy. The people of Connecticut can sympathize with the people of Minnesota at a time like this. Just over 24 years ago, a bridge carrying Interstate 95 over the Mianus River in Greenwich, CT, collapsed in the early afternoon. Four vehicles plunged into the river, three people