

reauthorize Amtrak and make important changes to secure a prosperous future for intercity passenger rail in the United States. In a year when Amtrak faces yet another crisis, in part due to the administration's proposal to severely reduce Amtrak funding in an effort to restructure the railroad through bankruptcy, this bill is all the more necessary. Additionally, congestion delays at our airports and on our roads are making more and more travelers dependent on passenger rail. We need to ensure that our national passenger rail system is adequately prepared to accommodate this increased ridership.

I congratulate Senator LAUTENBERG and Senator LOTT for crafting this important bill, of which I am a cosponsor. This bill encourages the development of new rail corridors, provides incentives for Amtrak to operate more efficiently, and strengthens the relationship between Amtrak and the States in which it operates. This bill will also provide more transparency into Amtrak's operations and help Amtrak better control its costs. I believe that it will further fortify Amtrak as an important, necessary, and viable option in the United States' transportation landscape.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

LABOR-HHS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I am in strong support of the fiscal year 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill. I thank the chairman of the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator HARKIN, and the ranking member, Senator SPECTER, for their leadership in crafting this bill and ensuring some of our Nation's most critical priorities are adequately funded. I am proud that we have been able to negotiate a bipartisan appropriations bill that passed the Senate.

This bill is one of the most important funding bills that comes before us. It fulfills our responsibilities in key priorities, such as health care and education. With the passage of this legislation, we will be striking a significant departure from the administration's damaging trend of shortchanging our children, our schools, our workers, and our health. Instead of undermining education, abdicating our responsibilities on health care, weakening the rights of our workers, this bill will restore a commonsense balance to our values that we should expect from the greatest Nation in the world.

I would like to highlight a few areas in which this bill is especially success-

ful and contrast them to the administration's misguided priorities.

While the President's budget zeroed out funding for mentoring programs under the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act—a program that is critical to keeping our children safe and off the streets—I am proud that this bill not only restores that funding, but increases it by more than \$30 million.

As someone whose dreams of college could not have been realized without Pell grants and other Federal financial aid, I am pleased this bill follows through on the promise to increase Pell grants and restores funding for Perkins loans. These increases will mean that today's young people who come from families that cannot afford college on their own can still achieve their dreams. I know the power of this assistance. Without these programs, I would not have been the first in my family to graduate from college and law school. There are millions of students nationwide who are in the shoes I once was. They are waiting, hoping that there will be adequate financial aid to help them access college. And as tuition continues to increase, as grant aid under this president has shrunk, that challenge is getting anything but easier. In my home state of New Jersey, where the average tuition rose 7 percent since last year, 4-year public colleges are the second most expensive in the Nation. Our students need more, not less, grant aid if they are going to achieve their dreams. This bill sets us in the right direction.

Another program that is vital to students in New Jersey is vocational education. The vocational State grants are critical for the institutions in our state that are working to develop a workforce that is able to compete in today's global economy. New Jersey has some of the best vocational and technical education programs in the country. And while this President continually speaks about an educated and competitive workforce in the science, technology and math fields, he does not put his money where his mouth is. His budget would have cut vocational funding in half. Our bill restores those cuts.

This bill also restores cuts to education technology grants, which the President called for eliminating. These grants help ensure that our children have access to technology in the classroom. New Jersey alone would have lost \$5 million next year under the President's cuts. In the global race to have the most trained, highly skilled, best prepared workforce, we are losing ground. The earlier we can introduce our young people to technology, to help them gain fluency in areas that involve technology, the better off they will be in an evolving and increasing technological world.

I am also pleased this bill increases funding for special education by more than \$500 million. This funding is critical to ensuring children with disabilities have an equal opportunity to receive a good public education, just as other children.

And ensuring all children begin on an equal playing field means adequately funding Head Start, which this bill does. This legislation provides a \$200 million increase for Head Start, which will help improve the school readiness of our young children to ensure they can get the skills necessary to succeed. Head Start provides child development, education, health care, nutrition, and socialization skills, all essential services that benefit more than nearly 1 million low-income children in this country.

This bill also helps our young people by expanding opportunities for them to learn trade skills. It provides a \$15 million increase for YouthBuild, which helps young people learn constructing and housing skills and prepare for post-secondary training. This legislation also provides an increase of almost \$82 million for Job Corps to help strengthen these centers that provide key job skills to young people.

In addition, this bill will help veterans transition to civilian life by providing a \$5 million increase for employment and training services.

In terms of health care, this bill makes significant changes to the President's budget proposal and redefines our priorities as a Nation. Overall, the bill provides \$68.1 billion in discretionary appropriations for Health and Human Services Department programs. This amount is \$5 billion more than last year's level and \$5.4 billion more than the administration's budget request.

The bill provides \$250 million more for Community Health Centers and over \$200 million for the National Center of Minority Health and Health Disparities to address the health care needs of our Nation's minority and underserved communities.

This bill will also provide almost \$29.9 billion in funding for the National Institutes of Health, \$1.3 billion more than the Bush administration's budget request. The Centers for Disease Control would also receive \$6.4 billion under this bill which is \$444 million more than the administration's request. It is imperative that we continue to invest in our Nation's health and research facilities as their work will save and improve the lives of millions of Americans.

I am proud that this bill also provides \$8 million for the initial implementation of the Patient Navigator, Outreach, and Chronic Disease Prevention Act of 2005, which President Bush signed into law in 2005. I sponsored this legislation when I was in the House of Representatives in order to improve health outcomes by helping patients, including patients in underserved communities, to overcome barriers they face in getting early screening and appropriate followup treatment. This funding will help get people in to see a doctor before symptoms develop, so we can catch diseases such as cancer or diabetes early. Then we can get patients in to treatment early, which means

they'll have a better chance of survival and the health care costs will be lower. I know that this funding, and the health provisions in this Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill, will truly help to save lives.

This legislation is critical and makes a strong commitment to our Nation's future. This legislation will bolster our commitment to the education, health and well-being of our Nation's workforce.

TRIBUTE TO DIANE BAHRENBURG

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would like to pay tribute to one of Vermont's outstanding teachers, Diane Bahrenburg, who last month was named the 2008 Vermont Teacher of the Year. Diane is an English teacher at Colchester High School in Vermont, where she has taught since 1979. I recently had the opportunity to meet Diane in my Washington office, and I was impressed with her intellect, her passion for teaching, and her commitment to the students of Colchester High School. As we talked about her classes and students, it was evident how much Diane cares about teaching.

In being chosen as Vermont's Teacher of the Year, Diane will have the opportunity to visit schools throughout our State and others around the country. Her travels will allow her to work with other teachers, sharing and discussing the methods that have helped her become so successful. Hopefully she will share with all of us how she has been able to balance the everyday demands of teaching in the classroom, with the work she has done as an adjunct instructor at Johnson State College and UVM, acting as the Vermont debate-forensics lead coach at Colchester High School, and being a parent.

We all know that teaching is a hard job. And it is a crucial job an indispensable link between our young people and their futures, as well as our Nation's future. The opportunities for recognition of teachers' accomplishments are too few and too far between. So I am so pleased that Diane is being recognized for all she has done over three decades, day in and day out, to educate our children and to make a constructive difference, one child at a time. Teachers are the instrument by which we measure the success of our schools. The knowledge, skill, and experience of teachers like Diane are exactly what we need in each and every one of our classrooms.

We are fortunate in Vermont. I continue to be impressed by the high level of achievement of Vermont's students and the academic gains that have been made because of the strong and committed efforts of teachers like Diane. In spite of the countless hours spent sorting through the maze of No Child Left Behind requirements, our teachers are able to inspire students to look beyond tests and find the true lessons of the classroom.

As an alumnus of St. Michael's College in Vermont, I would be remiss if I failed to note that Diane received her master's in education degree from St. Michael's College in 2000. I believe that she embodies the core principles of the college's education programs with her skill in maintaining an inclusive classroom, while keeping a balance between challenge and support and between individual and community. Diane is a model teacher, and after decades of teaching, she is incredibly worthy of this recognition. Diane, again I say thank you for all that you do, and on behalf of the Senate, we say congratulations.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO DAVID TAWEI LEE

• Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I would like to acknowledge the service of Representative David Tawei Lee, who has given nearly 3 years of exceptional service as Taiwan's principal representative to the United States. Representative Lee recently departed Washington, DC, to take on his next assignment as Taiwan's Representative to Canada. He leaves behind a legacy of friendship, prosperity, and understanding.

When Representative Lee arrived in Washington, he came equipped with a wealth of experience and insight. A foremost expert on U.S.-Taiwan relations, Mr. Lee has studied, written, and published on U.S.-Taiwan political and economic ties, including the development of the Taiwan Relations Act. I believe Representative Lee will be remembered not only for his excellent knowledge of history but also for his accomplishments.

While serving in Washington, Representative Lee dedicated his energy, intelligence, and spirit to expanding Taiwan-American ties. He raised the cultural and political profile of Taiwan and its people with cultural and education programs. To enhance our economic ties, Representative Lee oversaw the successful acceleration of our bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement talks. And he worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the benefits of a potential U.S.-Taiwan Free Trade Agreement. In these areas alone, he has left a legacy of which he should take pride.

Representative Lee's dedication and efforts were also felt far beyond our Nation's Capital. Three years ago, I was delighted to personally welcome Mr. Lee to my home State of Montana. There he witnessed Big Sky Country in all of its glory, making friends with hospitable and generous Montanans. But together we also saw the deep and healthy roots of the Montana-Taiwan economic relationship. At its core are Montana's finest agricultural products, which have long found their way to Taiwanese dinner tables and bakeries. Today, Taiwan purchases over 30 million bushels of Montana wheat annu-

ally. Our fine Montana beef is also in demand. This relationship benefits families in both Montana and Taiwan. And I hope it will continue to grow stronger.

It has truly been a pleasure to work with Representative Lee. His personal touch to everything he did will not be forgotten. And the value of his contributions will be remembered for many years to come. I wish him luck in all of his future endeavors.●

TRIBUTE TO LOUISIANA WWII VETERANS

• Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to a group of 94 World War II veterans from Louisiana that is making its way to Washington this weekend. Here the veterans will visit the World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Iwo Jima memorials as well as Arlington National Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns.

The trip to the Nation's Capital this Saturday is being sponsored by a group in Lafayette, LA, called Louisiana HonorAir. The organization is honoring each surviving World War II Louisiana veteran by giving them a chance to see the memorials dedicated to their service. So far this year, there have been three trips to these Washington memorials and two more are planned, including this one.

World War II was the deadliest conflict in our history. More than 60 million people worldwide were killed, including 40 million civilians, and more than 400,000 American service members were slain during the long war.

In Louisiana, there remain today about 44,000 living World War II veterans, and every one of them has their own heroic tale of their experience in achieving the noble victory of freedom over tyranny.

One of our veterans traveling for his first time to Washington is Frank Menard from Lafayette. Originally from Youngsville, he was drafted into the Army in 1942 at 21 years old and trained at Camp Claiborne in Rapides Parish. In 1943, he was sent to England as part of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, serving as a driver and a mechanic. He participated in many battles with the Nazis during his 3 years in Europe, including the Battle of Normandy, where an enemy artillery shell struck his truck, and the Battle of the Bulge, which severely crippled German forces. His French and German language skills helped him gather intelligence about enemy plans. During the Battle of the Bulge, he took a pregnant Belgian woman whose toes had been shot off by the Germans to an American hospital, saving her life. When he returned to Louisiana after the war, Frank used his mechanics skills to become a union electrician in Lake Charles and Lafayette, where he settled.