

and not allow us to retail the fuel as we should—there are outrageous stories of them not allowing the prices to be posted or the pumps to be put in. There are only 1,200 ethanol pumps in this country and 320 of them are in my State, but who is counting. If we are going to move forward with biomass and with our own energy, we have to allow this industry to develop.

When I talk to farmers across our State, what they like most about the 2002 farm bill is the safety net and the way it worked. It worked well for the first time in a long time. What we did with this farm bill was basically allow that safety net to stay in place and also rebalance the commodity programs to be more equitable for some northern crops such as wheat, oats, barley, soybeans, and canola.

I met with our wheat and barley growers a few hours ago. They are one of the many groups that care a lot about this. Again, they revitalized a lot of the areas of our State that had been troubled because of the fact that we have a thriving rural economy.

Another top priority for Minnesota farmers was creating a permanent program for disaster assistance. I thank Senator BAUCUS and the Finance Committee for their work in this area. Farmers are tired of coming back to Congress every year with a tin cup. We have been hit by drought, flooding, and everything in between. They had to wait for 3 years for Congress to pass the ad hoc disaster relief bill, and the permanent program of disaster relief will give farmers the security they need in moving forward.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are from farm States to think about the importance of this disaster program for their States.

The farm bill is not, as we know, just about the commodity programs and the safety net. It is also about energy. It is also, as I mentioned, about biofuels. I mentioned the cellulosic piece of it that is so important. It also includes bipartisan legislation Senator CRAPO and I introduced to double the mandatory funding for the Biodiesel Education Program. Spreading the word about biodiesel to drivers and gas stations is very important if we are going to help that industry. Again, I urge every Senator who wants less dependence on foreign oil to look at the energy portion of this farm bill.

One of the things that has plagued our rural communities in the last decade or so is the inability for younger people to get involved in farming. The committee accepted my amendment to improve the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program. There are real opportunities today to start out in farming, especially in growing areas such as organic farming and energy production. But beginning farmers also face big obstacles, including limited access to credit and technical assistance and the high price of land.

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Programs in this farm bill provide

mentoring and outreach for new farmers and training in business planning and credit building—the skills they need to succeed and to stay on the land. If you are concerned because you have seen fewer and fewer young people going into farming in your State, I urge you to move this bill forward.

As I said, there are a lot of good things for Minnesota and for our country in this farm bill. There is, however, one area that needs reform and that is that we need to stop urban millionaires from pocketing farm subsidies intended for hard-working farmers. Here are the facts in our State. Minnesota is the sixth largest agricultural-producing State in the Nation and, I would add, as we approach Thanksgiving, the No. 1 turkey producer in our country. I was able to judge a race recently between a Minnesota turkey and a Texas turkey at the King Turkey Days in Worthington, MN, and I would like to report that the Minnesota turkey won the race. The Texas turkey got too cold and had to be carried over the finish line.

Minnesota, as I said, is the sixth largest agricultural-producing State in the Nation. Nationally, 60 farms have collected more than \$1 million each under the 2002 farm bill. None of them are in our State. The average income for Minnesota farms, after expenses, is \$54,000, but under the current system, a part-time farmer can have an income as high as \$2.5 million from outside sources and still qualify for Federal benefits.

I very strongly support this farm bill, but I also believe we need some reform in this area because it makes no sense to hand out payments to multimillionaires when this money should be targeted to family farmers and conservation and nutrition and other programs under the farm bill. Right now, nearly 600 residents of New York City, 559 residents of Washington, DC, and even 21 residents of Beverly Hills 90210 received Federal farm checks in the past 3 years. Some collected hundreds of thousands of dollars.

We have the opportunity to fix this in this farm bill because the administration has not been doing its job in enforcing the rules, so I say let's use this farm bill to do it. Already in this farm bill in both the House and the Senate we have gotten rid of the "three entity" rule, of which there is much abuse. The House bill does contain some income eligibility limits. I believe it is \$1 million for a full-time farmer, \$500,000 for the part-time farmer. We, in this farm bill, have an ability to go further, as I suggested, with an amendment for \$750,000 for full time and \$250,000 part time. The Dorgan-Grassley amendment, which passed this Chamber in the past, would keep subsidy levels at \$250,000. You put that in this farm bill. If we don't have this farm bill, if our colleagues will not allow the Senate to proceed, if we are not allowed to make this reform which the administration has not enforced on

its own—I believe this is a great opportunity for us.

For the reasons I laid out there for the energy title, which is forward thinking, for the conservation title, which is more funding and much more aggressive look at conservation, for the nutrition title, where we are finally promoting our fruits and vegetables and are doing new things to promote more healthy kids—these are all things that are different about this farm bill. If we rest on our laurels and don't do anything new, we are not going to be able to move in the direction we want for the energy revolution in this country.

When my daughter did a project for sixth grade on biofuels last year, she actually drew a map of the State of Minnesota.

She had two little dots that said "Minneapolis" and "St. Paul," then she had a big circle that said "Pine City, the home of farmer Tom Peterson." That is whom she had talked to about biofuels.

I tell you this story because the future for our economy in Minnesota and across the country, when you look at energy, the rural part of our country is going to have a big piece of this. It is necessary for that development.

If we do not pass this farm bill, we are not going to get there. I urge my colleagues, for that and many other reasons, to move forward with the 2007 farm bill.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 1429

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 3:30 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 1429, Head Start Authorization; that it be considered under the following limitations; that there be 60 minutes of debate with respect to the conference report, with the time equally divided and controlled between the chair and ranking member of the HELP Committee, or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote on adoption of the conference report without further intervening action or debate.

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 3:30 p.m.

Thereupon, at 2:01 p.m., the Senate recessed until 3:30 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. SANDERS).

IMPROVING HEAD START FOR SCHOOL READINESS ACT OF 2007—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 1429, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 1429) to reauthorize the Head Start Act, to improve program quality, to expand access, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of Friday, November 9, 2007.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will be 60 minutes of debate equally divided.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I thank my friend and colleague, the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. ENZI, for his strong advocacy and extremely effective work on this legislation. I also thank the staff of the HELP committee for their work on this important piece of legislation. This is an important moment in the Senate because this reauthorization of Head Start focuses on the most vulnerable members of society, the children, and it delivers a message of hope for these children and their families.

HELP Committee members are extremely involved and active in all the matters that come before our committee, but never more than on issues of education and early childhood development. We have before us legislation that reflects a coming together of both parties and both chambers of Congress to address the needs of children in our society. Reflected in this legislation are the interest of some of those who aren't with us physically, colleagues who are involved in the Presidential campaign. Senator DODD, who has been a longtime leader in the Senate on children and children's interests, has had important suggestions and recommendations. BARACK OBAMA has followed this process very closely and has been in frequent communication with us. Senator CLINTON has been very much involved in crafting this legislation, as well as a number of other pieces of legislation we approved in the committee earlier today.

We welcome an overwhelming vote this afternoon. There was an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives, 381 to 36. I am hopeful we will have a similar expression of support in the Senate.

We have an hour. I know I have several colleagues who want to talk. I will yield myself 12 minutes. I don't know how much I have used so far.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 3½ minutes. Is that another 12 on top of the 3½?

Mr. KENNEDY. No, a total of 12. If the Chair will let me know when I have a minute and a half, I would appreciate that.

Planning for Head Start began in the early 1960s, before we knew all that we know today about how to best inter-

vene and support the lives of young children living in poverty. At that time, as Attorney General, my brother Robert Kennedy decided to tackle the problem of juvenile delinquency. Research pointed to poverty as the root of the Nation's social and economic challenges. It was agreed that a strategy based on early education could be a significant part of the answer.

In August 1964, President Johnson and Congress launched the war on poverty by passing the Economic Opportunity Act. The Nation's poor numbered 10 million, with nearly half under the age of 12.

In the fall of that year, my brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, convened a panel of experts in child development, education, public health, and social work to lay a foundation for the Head Start program. He envisioned a bold national commitment to prepare our neediest children for kindergarten and first grade. He conferred with experts like Dr. Edward Zigler, who is still a vigorous, forceful advocate for children, and they agreed that a comprehensive approach was needed. Preschool was the centerpiece of the plan, but a major emphasis was placed on health care and parent involvement, too.

The following year, Head Start came into being as an 8-week summer program. With the help of thousands of volunteers, it served 560,000 children through preschool classes, medical and dental care, and health services. Over the years, it would reach over 24 million.

Today the face of poverty and of America's neediest families has changed. The American workplace has changed, and our education system is being challenged to keep up with the global economy. Head Start has always adapted, finding new ways to respond to the demands on low-income, working families. But its mission has remained the same—to help our most vulnerable children succeed in school and in life.

When parents are asked what they most want to accomplish in life, their answer undoubtedly includes a desire to open the doors of opportunity for their children. They want a fair chance for their children to grow up in a healthy and safe environment, to graduate from high school and go on to college, and to achieve the American dream.

That dream should be available to every child in America. But far too often, families are still struggling to put food on the table, buy clothes for their children, pay the rent, or see a doctor. Poverty is again on the rise. Today, one out of every five children in America grows up poor.

Poverty has many dimensions. It is a labor issue, because pay is so low and workers are exploited. It is a civil rights issue, because so many African American and Latino families are often the ones left behind. It is a health care issue, because the health care that

families in poverty receive is so substandard. Most of all, it is a children's issue, because the children of the poor have done nothing wrong. But they still pay the price.

It is our responsibility as a Nation to help those in need. The Federal bedrock of that commitment is Head Start. It has always been an important symbol of our responsibility to others. At its core are the values that shaped our democracy: Equity, opportunity, community empowerment, and economic progress.

Head Start is based on the premise that education is the key to the future and to breaking down the destructive forces of poverty.

It provides the starting point for a child's day, with a healthy meal each morning and a promise to parents that while they are at work and balancing two jobs, their children will see a doctor and dentist, and receive immunizations.

It provides children with the building blocks they need to enter school ready to learn. It teaches the social and emotional skills needed by children to pay attention in the classroom and get along well with others. It expands their vocabulary, gets them excited about reading, and teaches them to count.

It welcomes parents into its programs, gives them opportunities to make decisions about their child's learning and development, and sometimes helps families find a roof for over their head.

Over the years, with each new educational and developmental advance in research, we have learned more about how Head Start can be improved. And with that learning, modifications have been made to enable the program to be even more effective.

In 1972, the Child Development Associate program was established, to provide a standard of quality for Head Start teachers and aides.

In 1974, the reauthorization of Head Start established the comprehensive Program Performance Standards to guide Head Start centers in providing essential educational, health, and social services, and achieving parental involvement. The reauthorization also paved the way for a network of training and technical assistance activities to help Head Start agencies enhance the quality of their programs.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Indian and Migrant Head Start programs were formed, and family service centers were established to combat illiteracy, substance abuse, and unemployment in Head Start communities. At that time, Head Start also began its important focus on improving transitions for preschool children to public schools.

In 1994, we created Early Head Start to serve low-income infants and toddlers in the first 3 years of their development. That legislation also led to the development of improved performance measures to assess outcomes in Head Start and new guidelines for monitoring Head Start programs.

The current reauthorization applies the lessons learned from the past with the new knowledge of child development and early education to enable Head Start to be even more successful in the years ahead.

There is no question that Head Start is effective. Our own federally mandated study of Head Start found that it expands children's vocabularies, and makes the greatest difference for those with the greatest needs. Head Start improves children's writing skills, and helps children grow in their social skills and behavior.

By the time Head Start children complete their kindergarten year, their skills and developmental abilities are near the national average, with scores of 99 in early literacy, 98 in early writing, 95 in early math, and 95 in vocabulary.

We are talking about the most disadvantaged children in America. They are often well behind in terms of their ability to enter school ready to start. Look at the results at the end of kindergarten. Head Start children catch up to their peers, to the national norm. It brings the children up so, hopefully, we will be, as a country and society, more equitable, more fair.

This reauthorization maintains high standards and comprehensive services in Head Start. It upgrades educational components of the program, and ensures that it delivers the skills and support that children need to succeed in kindergarten and the early grades. It promotes greater partnerships between Head Start programs and local schools, and ensures that services continue to be framed by the highly effective Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. It also provides a needed bridge for parents to their local schools, to promote greater coordination and ease the transition of children from preschool to kindergarten.

We also terminate the flawed National Reporting System, and ensure that new educational standards and measures used in Head Start will be informed by the National Academy of Sciences. Two years ago, the Government Accountability Office confirmed many of our long-standing concerns with this assessment, concluding that the test is not valid to make determinations about programs and students. The study also confirmed that the test was inconsistent with nationally-recognized testing standards, and unclear in its purpose.

This reauthorization ensures that any assessments used in Head Start will be valid and reliable, fair to children from all backgrounds, and measure the whole child. Head Start children and their families deserve nothing less.

Head Start teachers and staff are the heart and future of the program. They help children learn to identify letters and arrange the pieces of puzzles. They teach them to brush their teeth, wash their hands, make friends, and follow rules.

This reauthorization sets important and unprecedented goals for enhancing the skills and qualifications of Head Start teachers and staff. In this reauthorization, we are striving to help all teachers earn their associate's degree over the next 6 years, help half of all teachers in Head Start earn their bachelor's degree, and help all assistant teachers work toward completing a CDA or another early education credential.

These are ambitious goals. But we know that learning and development of young children require good teachers and that there is a strong link between educational qualifications and the quality of programs.

The quality of a program doesn't just depend on the educational background of its teachers, which is why we are also calling for professional development and a career advancement plan for every Head Start employee including family service workers, assistant teachers, and curriculum coordinators. We have established new partnerships to increase staff in Head Start who are prepared to serve the diverse children enrolled in the programs.

Most of all, we have worked to ensure that Head Start agencies have a dedicated stream of funds to provide needed training for teachers. The reauthorization dedicates \$2 million this year to local training and improvement efforts, much of which will be used to improve and strengthen the Head Start workforce. We commit to confronting the persistent challenge of compensating Head Start teachers as the professionals that they are. Head Start teachers earn half the salary of kindergarten teachers, and turnover is about 11 percent per year.

This conference report commits 40 percent of new funds in Head Start to program quality and teacher salaries, to do more to attract and retain caring and committed leaders. It ensures that each Head Start Center will receive an annual cost-of-living increase to keep up with the rising costs of operation and overhead.

We grant additional flexibility in this reauthorization for Head Start to serve thousands of additional low-income children in need, by including families just above the Federal poverty level. It is essential for Head Start to prioritize its services to the neediest families in their communities. But this new flexibility enables those living near poverty and earning less than what they need to get by to receive assistance too. It is the right thing to do, and it is what Head Start is all about.

The reauthorization also makes a long-overdue commitment to expanding Head Start programs in Indian country, and programs for migrant and seasonal farmworkers. By reserving up to \$20 million annually to expand services in these programs, we can hopefully reach an additional 5,500 migrant children and an additional 5,100 Native American children living in poverty. New provisions are also included to en-

hance services for homeless children, children who are English language learners, and children with disabilities in order to ensure that these populations receive the care and attention they deserve.

Accountability is a cornerstone of excellence and should start early. Head Start should be accountable for its commitment to provide safe and healthy learning environments, to support each child's individual pattern of development and learning, to build community partnerships in services to children, and to involve parents in their child's growth.

This reauthorization makes significant progress in increasing accountability and investing in excellence in Head Start. It continues the comprehensive monitoring that has become a hallmark of Head Start, and ensures that reviews are fair and balanced in order to account for challenges and strengths in programs. It also establishes a new system for the designation of Head Start grants, to be phased in over the next several years.

We know that the vast majority of Head Start programs provide outstanding services—fewer than 20 percent of programs are found to be deficient each year. But where serious deficiencies exist, we must see that substantial problems do not languish at the expense of children. If a local program is unable to meet Head Start's high standards of quality, timely action should be taken. This new system will facilitate accountability and funding decisions, and do so in a manner that is transparent, fair, and responsive to the local needs of families and children.

We have established greater accountability for enrollment in programs and delineated a clear system of governance in Head Start.

The reauthorization also takes important steps to expand Early Head Start. Since its inception, results have proven that Early Head Start is one of the most effective programs of the Department of Health and Human Services. In this legislation, we improve the training and assistance network serving Early Head Start and guarantee a dedicated expert in each State to work with programs to meet the needs of infants and toddlers. We also expand the screening available to infants exposed to trauma, violence, or other circumstances detrimental to their development. We commit to expanding Early Head Start to serve an additional 8,000 low-income infants and toddlers over the next 5 years.

As in elementary and secondary education, reform in early childhood education requires resources. Today, half of all children eligible for Head Start have no access to it. Early Head Start however, serves only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers—we leave behind a shameful 97 percent.

When Sargent Shriver discussed the war on poverty, he said "You have to put immense resources into winning a

war." He was right, and he wasn't talking about wars like Iraq. He was talking about the war on poverty. This conference report increases authorizations for Head Start to \$7.3 billion in fiscal year 2008, \$7.6 billion in fiscal year 2009, and \$7.9 billion in fiscal year 2010. On a bipartisan basis, the conferees have signaled a commitment to invest more in our youngest children, and to assist Head Start in responding to the changing and evolving needs of the communities it serves.

Research shows that the first 5 years of life make an immense difference for a child. Those who attend high-quality early education programs are more likely to do well when they reach elementary school, are less likely to be held back a grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college.

Our Federal investment in early childhood education clearly pays off—for every dollar invested in high-quality early education, there is a 16 dollar return later in life.

All children—regardless of their background—deserve to learn and develop. We need to strengthen early childhood for young children, in order to help them succeed later in school and in life.

A comprehensive curriculum and a stable and well-qualified workforce are cornerstones of a good early education. I am especially pleased that this reauthorization of Head Start includes a blueprint to strengthen the array of early childhood programs and services for young children.

The bill establishes an Early Childhood Advisory Council to examine needs of early childhood programs, develop a plan to improve professional development, upgrade standards, enhance collaboration among programs, and improve data collection.

More than 40 States have early learning standards in place or under development. States such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Illinois have developed the systems needed to improve program quality and expand access to programs in the early years. We need to build on that progress. States that are ready to take on the challenge of implementing needed improvements in their early education programs will qualify for incentive grants to get such improvements under way.

One of our highest priorities in Congress is to expand educational opportunities for every American. In this age of globalization, every citizen deserves a chance to acquire the skills needed to compete in the modern economy. That challenge begins at birth, and accelerates in the early years of life well before children even begin kindergarten.

This reauthorization helps us reach this essential goal. It keeps Head Start on its successful path, and enables it to continue to thrive and improve.

We still haven't won the war on poverty in America. But thanks to Head Start, we are getting closer. Day by day, and one child at a time. This con-

ference report continues that indispensable progress, and I urge my colleagues to approve it.

Mr. President, we have others who desire to speak at this time. I will have a chance with the remaining time, perhaps, to get into some of the additional items.

Mr. President, I reserve the remainder of my time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank Senator KENNEDY for that excellent recap of what has taken us months, in fact, years to get done.

I am pleased after many years of false starts, we have finally reached agreement on Head Start reauthorization. This conference agreement is a bipartisan, bicameral effort that focuses on improving the lives of low-income children and their families. We need to ensure that children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to get the preparation they need to enter school ready to learn and be successful.

The Head Start Program was established in 1965 as part of the war on poverty to level the playing field for low-income children. The purpose of the program was, and remains, to provide educational and other developmental services to children in very low income families. It recognizes that children do not start school with the same set of experiences or knowledge. Head Start programs provide low-income children with a solid base of experiences and knowledge that enables them to start their elementary school experience on par with their more affluent peers.

Since its creation, Head Start has been a comprehensive, early childhood development program that provides educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to low-income, preschool-aged children and their families. Head Start currently provides services to over 900,000 children and their families through a network of over 1,600 public and private agencies. This program also recognizes the important role that families play in a child's development and encourages their regular participation in the program.

I do thank Senator KENNEDY and Congressman MILLER for their commitment to working together on a bipartisan basis. That commitment has resulted in a conference report that meets the needs of children and families who participate in Head Start programs throughout our Nation. I also thank my other colleagues, particularly Senators ALEXANDER and DODD, and Congressmen McKEON, KILDEE, and CASTLE, for their fine work and dedication to this important legislation.

The conference agreement before us today builds off legislation we developed last Congress when I was chairman of the HELP Committee. Senator KENNEDY agreed to use that legislation as the base for this year's bill to build on the bipartisan support it had received. Senator KENNEDY and I under-

stand that to get anything done, especially in the Senate, you have to have bipartisan support.

Years ago, I established an "80-percent rule" to help guide my work in committee and on the Senate floor. It means that 80 percent of what Congress works on we agree to. The other 20 percent is the stuff we may never agree on. But that is what always seems to get the attention. I do think we do our best work when we focus on the 80 percent. Legislation seems to move more quickly when we work together in a bipartisan way.

I am pretty certain people in Massachusetts are cringing, and people in Wyoming are cringing and saying: Oh, no, KENNEDY and ENZI are doing it again. But that is the way things get done, and we have quite a track record of doing things that wind up pretty unanimous on both sides of the Capitol because they figure with our two backgrounds it has to be reasonable or we will not agree. That is exactly how it works out.

So this bill probably will not make headlines, and it is not the most sensational sound bite. However, this is work Congress can and must do to improve the lives of children and families across America.

Today, with the passage of the Head Start conference report, we begin to fulfill this obligation. But our work is far from done. This is just the first in a number of education and training bills we have to complete this Congress.

With the reauthorization of the Head Start Act, the first bookend is in place. I hope we can continue to work together on legislation to reauthorize No Child Left Behind, the Higher Education Act, and the Workforce Investment Act. These four bills represent the continuum of education and workforce training legislation supported by the Federal Government—with Head Start as one bookend and the Workforce Investment Act as the other.

These acts support programs from preschool, through elementary and high school, into postsecondary education and the workforce, and are critical to maintaining our global competitiveness. We cannot afford to let those programs fall victim to election year politics.

I am pleased the House Education and Labor Committee has moved forward with the markup of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. It is my hope we can continue this momentum and move into a conference on that important legislation in the very near future.

Head Start provides the building blocks children need for success later in life. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 before us today helps ensure that children in Head Start programs will be better prepared to enter school with the skills necessary to succeed. We have always worked hard to improve and strengthen this act because we believe in the future success of all children.

I am particularly pleased with the accountability provisions in this conference report. The conference agreement includes important changes related to the evaluation and review of grantees. We have taken steps to increase the quality of Head Start, and there is now greater clarity for grantees as to what constitutes a program deficiency.

The roles of governing body and policy councils have been clarified and strengthened, while also preserving the important role of parents. It is absolutely necessary and vital that a single entity, the governing body, has fiscal and legal control of the Federal grant dollars. That said, we maintain the equally vital and necessary role of the policy councils in setting program priorities, classroom activities, and classroom personnel changes. We believe this will help ensure the continued integrity of the Head Start Program for years to come.

Parents are their children's first teachers. It is vital we continue to encourage and strengthen the role parents play in Head Start programs. This conference agreement increases the presence of parents in Head Start programs. It strengthens services for families, and it provides training and development opportunities for parents who serve on policy councils and governing boards.

Today we are taking the final legislative step toward a comprehensive and bipartisan reauthorization of the Head Start Program. As we take this step to reauthorize Head Start, it is important we review the effectiveness and need for the 57 other early childhood and preschool programs currently receiving Federal support. Many of those programs are programs in name only. Others are ineffective and fail to provide the services children need to be ready for school. We have to direct funds to programs that have been shown to be effective at preparing children for success in elementary school. Head Start is a successful program that deserves our continued support. This support should not be diluted by competing programs or the creation of new programs.

I again wish to thank all the members of both committees, in particular Senators KENNEDY, ALEXANDER, ISAKSON and DODD, and Congressmen MILLER, McKEON, KILDEE, and CASTLE, for getting this done.

I also thank all of the staff who worked to complete this reauthorization. Many of them have been working toward this day since early January. In particular, I would like to thank the following staff for Congressman MILLER: Ruth Friedman, Lamont Ivey, Denise Forte, and Stephanie Moore; for Congressman McKEON: Kirsten Duncan, James Bergeron, and Susan Ross; for Congressman KILDEE: Lloyd Horwich; for Congressman CASTLE: Jessica Gross; for Senator KENNEDY: Roberto Rodriguez, Carmel Martin, and David Johns—I would like to mention how

well Senator KENNEDY's staff and my staff have been able to work together on all of the issues—for Senator ISAKSON: Glee Smith; for Senator ALEXANDER: David Cleary and Sarah Rittling; and for Senator DODD: Catherine Hildum, and former staffer Sharon Lewis.

For my staff, I want to be sure to thank Lindsay Hunsicker, who has done a marvelous job of working and understanding and providing some creativity in the decisions that had to be made to get here; Beth Buehlmann, who oversees all of these education issues and is making sure they are moving forward in a bipartisan way; and Ilyse Schuman, who is the legal brains behind the drafting and decisions for my team; Katherine McGuire, who heads up the team as staff director; and, of course, Kelly Hastings.

Passage of this conference report will ensure that low-income children are prepared not only for success in school but, most importantly, for later success in life.

I look forward to getting this conference report to President Bush for his signature as soon as possible.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and reserve the remainder of my time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Washington, Mrs. MURRAY, who has been particularly involved in making sure parents are going to be included in this program. She has been such an outspoken advocate for the homeless and foster children who so often get left out and left behind. She is a former schoolteacher herself and member of a school board. She brings extraordinary knowledge, experience, and understanding to this problem. We are very fortunate to have her on our committee, and the Senate is very fortunate to have her as well. I hope they listen to her message.

Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Washington.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Massachusetts.

I am delighted we are here today to talk about one of the most important things this Congress has done for our children, and that is the Head Start Program.

I thank the Senators from Massachusetts and Wyoming for shepherding this important bill to the floor today, where it is in its last final step before it reaches the President for his signature.

For over 40 years now, Head Start has helped children from low-income families build the confidence and skills they have to have to succeed in school. As the Senator from Massachusetts said, I am a former preschool teacher, parent, school board member, and U.S. Senator. I can tell you, I have seen from every aspect how this important program benefits our children.

Today, I am very excited we are taking a vote to renew this important program. The bill we have in front of us now strengthens Head Start by making it more efficient, more accommodating, and more sensitive to our children's social, emotional, and developmental needs. It will allow us to better serve millions of children and improve on this already successful program.

This bill will help raise the quality that Senator KENNEDY talked about of our Head Start services across the country so that we ensure all of our children, no matter where they live, receive high quality, consistent services. Also, it will help ensure that all Head Start partners from our early childhood centers to our elementary schools, our childcare centers, our health care providers, our family service centers, are all working together in a coordinated way so we can best serve our young children and their families.

This bill increases funding authorization for Head Start each year from 2008 to 2010, and that will enable even more of our kids to start school ready to learn than ever before. I hope all of our colleagues will support this important bill, and I urge the President to sign it as soon as possible so we can put these new tools to work for our kids.

As the, I believe, only former preschool teacher here in the Senate, I feel a personal obligation to stand up for all of our young children. And standing up for our children, particularly our most vulnerable children, means standing up for Head Start. Each year, nearly a million poor children across this country attend our Head Start programs. Those kids didn't choose to be poor, but fortunately, since they live in this Nation, which values our young people, many of them are enrolled in Head Start where they can get the tools and the training they need to prepare them for school.

I thank Senator KENNEDY and his staff as well as Ranking Member ENZI for working so hard on this bill.

I am particularly proud of the provisions that increase Head Start access for our homeless and for our foster children. This bill will help improve transportation and services for these children and places a priority on enrolling them. These are some of our kids who face some of the greatest barriers to learning in our society, and I am glad we are making their success in school and in life an immediate priority.

I also fought to make sure that parents of children enrolled in this program have a voice in the decision-making process on local Head Start issues. I think our parents need to be involved in these programs and to have responsibility, and I think as their kids get a jump on learning through Head Start, this program will help our parents begin to understand that they have a very important and critical role in shaping their children's education. So I am very proud we were able to work out that language and move forward in a positive direction.

To name a few other quick additions, this reauthorization improves the transition of Head Start children to school by making sure that the curriculum they get matches their State early learning standards and kindergarten skills, which is very important. It also reserves 40 percent of new Head Start funds to improve programs as well as increase salaries for staffers, and it enables Native-American and migrant Head Start programs to expand, which will increase access to early learning for those particularly vulnerable populations.

I have visited Head Start centers all across my State. I have talked with teachers, I have talked with the parents, and I have talked with advocates about ways we can improve Head Start. I am very pleased that a number of their suggestions have been put into this bill. Washington State, my home State, is a leader in early learning efforts. I think we can all be proud of this bill, and I hope all of our colleagues will support it.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield 7 minutes to the former Secretary of Education.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to please let me know when I have 1 minute remaining.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will so advise.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, it is not too much to say that this vote on this piece of legislation on Head Start is about whose century this century will be. Some say it will be China's century. Some say it will be India's century. I think the jury is still out, but I do believe it can be the American century, and I believe it is up to us to make sure it is.

We have the advantages in our country. One of them, of course, is our brain power advantage. We don't have better brains than others, but since World War II, we have spent a great deal of time building our education system, our universities, our research laboratories. We worked together this year to pass the America COMPETES Act, authorizing \$34 billion over the next 3 years to step that up. A second advantage we have is the *e pluribus unum*. We are one country. Where different countries are fractured, we are working here to help our children and our new arrivals learn English, our common language, and to learn our American history so we can stay as one country. That is an advantage we have. The third advantage we have is that we are the only country in the world that believes that anything is possible. We don't say leave just a few children behind, or 80 percent of us are created equal; we set these very high goals. Anything is possible. Most of our politics is about failing to reach the goals,

dealing with the disappointment, and then trying again.

How do we make sure that the dream that anything is possible is real? Well, No. 1, we keep down taxes and we keep down regulations, and we keep markets free so people can go from the back to the front of the line. The other thing we do is to make sure that all Americans have a chance to get to the starting line ready. Some people need some help, and that is what Head Start is about.

I was very pleased to come to this floor in the earlier part of this year with Senator KENNEDY, Senator ENZI, and Senator DODD, introducing a piece of legislation that we hoped would get to the point this one has today. I thank them for the way they have worked on this for the last 3 or 4 years. It didn't matter much whether it was a Republican or a Democratic Senate; we all worked together and we are here now with this result.

A lot has changed, and there are four major advantages to this bill, in my opinion. No. 1, I call special attention to the 200 new centers of excellence that are created. These are opportunities for Governors to look, say, at Nashville or at Boston or at some place in their State and designate a center of excellence. These would be shining examples of all of the best efforts that are being made for early childhood education. The centers would get up to \$200,000 a year for 5 years and would hopefully try to coordinate all early childhood education and development efforts.

When I was a child, my mother's preschool class in the garage in our backyard was the only preschool education program in town. In the 1970s, Tennessee adopted public kindergarten for the first time, a few years after Head Start. Well, today, Head Start is a \$7 billion program. It has 1,700 agencies, 29,000 centers, but that is far from all the effort we are making. There are 21 billion Federal dollars for early childhood education, and many State and local dollars. They are not always spent in the most efficient manner. The President thought it would be better to give the Head Start funds to the States. I disagree with that. We have disagreed with that, but we have respected his impulse by saying in these 200 centers for the next 5 years, let's see what happens. Let's see what happens when States work with local governments and put all the Federal, State, and local money together for early childhood education in these centers for excellence.

Second, there is a system for renewal for Head Start agencies. There is not an automatic renewal after this time, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services will develop a process for that to make sure that for every cycle, the Head Start agency earns its right to continue. Third, there is clear authority to governing boards about the big dollars we are spending here and the big lives we are affecting. We

heard eloquent testimony from the mayor of Shelby County, A.C. Wharton, about money that was stolen down there. So we have done a better job listening to Mayor Wharton and to others in making it clear who is in charge of the money, who is in charge of the administration, and at the same time, making sure that the parents, who are the lifeblood of the uniqueness of Head Start, are active and full participants through policy councils.

Finally, as the President also recommended, we have worked over the last 2 or 3 years in developing this bill to increase cognitive learning standards. Forty years ago, we didn't know nearly as much about how the brains of very young children work, but we know now that to be ready to learn, to be at the starting line when the time comes to go to school, children need to learn more in their earlier years. So Head Start will provide that opportunity.

It is not too much to say that this bill is about whose century this will be. We hope it will be the century of every child in the world, but we like the idea that it could be the American century, and we want to take full advantage of the assets we have. One of the assets we have is the dream that anything is possible, that you can go from the back of the line to the front. We will keep our markets free. We will try to keep our taxes down. We will get rid of unnecessary regulations so people can get ahead. But this bill is a commitment that says we will also make certain we will do our best to make sure every single child has an opportunity to get to the starting line ready to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I am proud to rise in support of the conference report for the Head Start for School Readiness Act. Since 1965, Head Start has been one of the most successful Federal programs for helping low-income children and their families. This long overdue reauthorization is good news for over a million Americans who rely on Head Start's comprehensive services.

Head Start is for the poorest children. About 75 percent of Head Start families are at or below the poverty level. For a family of four, that is just \$20,600 per year. These children are often the furthest behind in learning to read and learning the alphabet. Yet Head Start makes a difference. In 1 year, these students see huge improvements in their vocabulary, increasing from the 16th percentile to the 32nd percentile, which is almost the national norm.

But Head Start does so much more. It brings children to the doctor to get immunizations and hearing checks. It helps parents get on the right track. Many parents become Head Start teachers and go back to school to get their degrees. It provides nutritious meals for children who might otherwise go hungry. I am a social worker. I have seen first hand children whose lives were changed by a simple hearing

aid or a good breakfast. Believe me: it can make all the difference.

Head Start is also a smart investment. Research shows that society accrues \$9 in benefits for every \$1 invested in Head Start children. Head Start graduates are more likely to have increased earnings and employment than non-Head Start participants. Head Start graduates are also less likely to be dependent on welfare or to have been charged with a crime when compared to their siblings who did not participate in the program.

Unfortunately, only 60 percent of eligible preschool children are in Head Start, and less than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are in Early Head Start. In Maryland, about 25 percent of eligible children age zero to 5 years are in Head Start and Early Head Start. The Bush administration has underfunded this critical Federal program for the past 7 years. Now is the time to renew the Federal investment in Head Start.

That is why I am proud to support this bill that makes low-income children and families a priority in the Federal checkbook. It increases the authorized spending level from \$6.9 billion in fiscal year 2007 to \$7.3 billion in fiscal year 2008. That is nearly a \$450 million increase. This increased investment will allow tens of thousands more children to participate in the program who would be otherwise turned away because of inadequate funding.

This bill also expands Head Start by increasing the eligibility income level from \$20,600 to \$26,800. This means that a family of four who are scrimping and saving on an annual income of only \$26,800 will no longer be denied the comprehensive services Head Start provides.

The Head Start for School Readiness Act makes a serious investment in our youngest children and their families. The benefits of Head Start to the children, their families and society at large far outweighs the cost. I urge my Senate colleagues to vote in favor of this conference report. Our young children deserve nothing less.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I strongly support H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. This important bipartisan legislation, which I helped craft as a member of the Senate Education Committee and as a conferee, reauthorizes the Head Start Act for the first time since 1998 and strengthens our commitment to ensuring that the nation's neediest children receive high-quality early education supports and services.

Since 1965, Head Start has provided comprehensive early childhood development, educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low-income preschool children and their families, and this reauthorization builds on our long-standing investment in this essential initiative.

There are two provisions that I am particularly pleased are included in this legislation, and which are impor-

tant to my State of Rhode Island. First, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act builds on provisions I first authored in 2003 to provide Head Start programs with additional flexibility to serve children up to 130 percent of poverty. Current law limits program eligibility to 100 percent of poverty or below. This increase in income eligibility will enhance the opportunity for struggling, low-income families to participate in Head Start while ensuring that programs prioritize serving families under the poverty guideline and enhance outreach to ensure those most in need are served first. Raising the income eligibility limit finally puts Head Start on the same level as other means-tested programs, which essentially all serve above the poverty level to provide for greater participation and help the working poor.

Second, this legislation for the first time establishes the Parent Policy Council as a decisionmaking authority within the governing structure of Head Start programs. Strong parent involvement in their children's early education and development has been a key tenet of the Head Start program since its inception in 1965, and is one of the primary reasons for the program's continuing success.

This reauthorization also includes a provision I authored to enhance coordination between Head Start programs and school and public libraries to excite children about the world of books, assist in literacy training for Head Start teachers, and support parents and other caregivers in literacy efforts.

Additionally, I am pleased that this conference report does not permit employment discrimination based on religion despite the administration's continuing advocacy for such a change. Faith-based organizations are an integral part of Head Start. However, there is no need to change a program that has encouraged their participation by allowing such discrimination.

I want to thank Chairmen KENNEDY, DODD, and MILLER and Ranking Members ENZI, ALEXANDER, and McKEON and their staffs, for their extraordinary work on this conference report. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act is significant legislation for the people of Rhode Island and the nation, and I am pleased to support it. This strong reauthorization in tandem with necessary funding increases will ensure that Head Start can continue its important and critical work to lessen the effects of poverty and ensure that children are successfully prepared for school and life.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today we approved the Conference Report on the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007—H.R. 1429. I applaud the good work of all involved. I particularly want to commend Chairman KENNEDY and Senator ENZI, as well as Chairman MILLER and Representative McKEON on the House side for their collective work on this important bill.

Head Start is a national program promoting school readiness through educational, health, nutritional, and social services. Currently, Head Start serves over 900,000 low-income children and their families in approximately 1,600 programs run by public and private agencies. As a whole-child, whole-family program, Head Start prepares children for what we hope will be a lifetime of learning.

I want to recognize and commend our Head Start programs in Utah. They do an outstanding job, and I believe this legislation will go a long way to providing additional support for them. I have appreciated their input during this long process.

I have been struck by some of the stories shared by our Head Start people in Utah. I remember hearing from one of our Head Start Directors that a number of children have never held a book before entering the program. When they are handed their first book, many don't know how to open it. Entering Head Start swings wide the doors of learning and opportunity and exposes young children to the reading and learning process.

I have also heard stories of Head Start children who were suffering from major medical problems that would not only threaten their ability to learn but their very lives. One of the great characteristics of the Head Start program includes the identification and treatment of several medical conditions, many problems can be detected and treated before they become serious learning impediments.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 not only reauthorizes the program, it greatly improves and strengthens it. This bill will enable more low-income children to get into the Head Start program. Utah has only been able to serve just over 50 percent of its eligible children. This bill provides for the expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start in States, like Utah, serving fewer than 60 percent of eligible children.

This bill strengthens the accountability of Head Start programs and improves the overall quality of Head Start grantees, as they will be reviewed every 5 years. It clarifies and strengthens the role of the governing board in the oversight of the program. It also respects the priority role of parents and family through the collaborative role of the policy councils and operations of the Head Start programs.

Through this legislation, the Head Start workforce is strengthened, as goals have been established for education standards for Head Start teachers, curriculum specialists, and teacher assistants. It requires Head Start teachers to have in-service training every year and ensures professional development for all Head Start staff working directly with children.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 strengthens coordination and collaboration of the program by aligning services with

State early learning standards, providing professional development opportunities for Head Start staff, and promoting partnerships with other agencies.

Because I believe that education is best done at the local and State levels with appropriate Federal support, I am pleased that under this bill, states will designate a State Advisory Council that will closely address the education and care of children from birth to school entry. I strongly support the authorization for Centers of Excellence to designate model exemplary Head Start programs in every State.

One of the concerns expressed by many of us as we started this process years ago, was the challenge of strengthening the academic portions of Head Start. Under this bill, Head Start agencies will use scientifically based measures to support learning and program evaluation. Recommendations of the National Academy of Science study on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children will be incorporated. Although the National Reporting System was intended to improve the program, it was found to be time-consuming and unwieldy for Head Start programs, and without demonstrated benefits. That reporting system has been eliminated under this bill.

In order to educate every child in our country, we must prepare them. Many pre-school children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, would have learning difficulties long before they entered elementary school. This bill will help these young, vulnerable, and teachable children develop the necessary early reading and math skills to be successful in school. It will address their health and nutritional needs, and it will provide important socialization. It also engages and empowers parents, and benefits us as a Nation.

I was proud to have worked with my colleagues on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to get this bill through the legislative process, and I was pleased to see it pass unanimously today.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the conference report to accompany the Head Start reauthorization bill. For the first time since 1998, Congress will send a bill to the President to reauthorize and strengthen the Head Start program.

A child's education begins well before he or she enters a school building for the first day of kindergarten. The children who succeed in kindergarten are the children whose parents read to them every day, who talk with them, and who engage their minds with games, art, and new experiences. These are the children who enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Unfortunately, many children enter kindergarten well behind their peers. They may have parents whose long hours interfere with the kind of time they spend with their small children. Or they may have parents who don't

know how important these early developmental activities are. That is why we created Head Start in 1965, to make sure low-income children are ready to learn when they arrive in kindergarten. Head Start provides preschool-aged, low-income children and their families with school activities, health screening, healthy snacks, and structure to encourage parental involvement.

Each year, over 900,000 children are served by Head Start nationwide; 40,000 of those children live in my home State of Illinois. The legislation that we are considering today will increase authorized funding for Head Start to \$7.9 billion in fiscal year 2010, allowing tens of thousands more children to participate in the program.

The legislation will also expand eligibility, allowing Head Start to serve low-income children and families up to 130 percent of Federal poverty, or \$26,800 for a family of four. It will also expand the Early Head Start program, so it can reach an additional 8,000 low-income infants and toddlers. The earlier children enroll in Head Start programs, the more likely they are to succeed once they enter kindergarten.

The legislation also sets new minimum qualification standards for Head Start teachers. Within 6 years, all Head Start teachers must have an associate's degree, and half of all teachers must have a bachelor's degree. Forty percent of new funding will be reserved for program quality enhancements, including much-needed salary increases for Head Start staff.

Educational standards will be strengthened in Head Start programs to make sure children are presented with language and literacy, math, science, and other cognitive development material. These new standards will be updated and aligned with the latest research in child development. The legislation we are considering today will improve the transition for children who are leaving Head Start to enter kindergarten, through better coordination between Head Start programs and schools, shared teacher training, and alignment of curriculum.

I am especially pleased that this legislation strengthens Head Start without weakening its long-standing civil rights protections for more than 200,000 Head Start teachers and 1.3 million parent volunteers.

Since 1972, the law has prohibited agencies that receive government funding for Head Start from employment discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, political affiliation, or beliefs. These civil rights protections have been reaffirmed all six times that the Head Start program has been reauthorized since then, and I strongly support the seventh reaffirmation today.

Preserving this provision is especially important given this administration's attempts to overturn long-standing principles of nondiscrimination through Executive orders, proposed

legislation, and, recently, Department of Justice opinions.

Let me be clear. I support the right of religious organizations to use religious criteria in hiring people to carry out their religious work. This exception—which is the current law—makes sense because it allows people of common faith to work together to further their religion's mission.

However, there is a fundamental difference between religious organizations using their own funds for their religious work and religious organizations using government funds for that purpose. In 1972, Congress established the current, expanded religious exception under title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The same Congress established the nondiscrimination provisions in Head Start that continue with today's legislation. They understood the difference between permitting hiring based on religion for religious functions not funded by the government, and allowing discrimination based on religion in hiring people to carry out activities funded by the Federal Government.

I also want to address a memo released last month by the Department of Justice entitled "Effect of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act on Faith-Based Applicants for Grants." This troubling memo concludes that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act allows faith-based organizations to receive Federal funds even when considering religion in employment. It further asserts that RFRA "protects this right to prefer co-religionists for employees even if the statute that authorizes the funding program generally forbids consideration of religion in employment decisions by grantees."

I strongly disagree with these conclusions in general, and especially with respect to the legislation before us today. The law and the history regarding Head Start is clear with respect to nondiscrimination in employment, and this explicit civil rights protection must be followed.

In closing, I want to affirm my strong support for the participation of religious organizations in the Head Start program. These organizations provide critical support for our Nation's children in 5 percent of Head Start centers and greatly improve our pre-schoolers' education. It is not surprising that Head Start is the second-largest source of federal funding for faith-based organizations.

This program truly is a model for how the government can successfully partner with faith-based organizations, while complying with nondiscrimination requirements.

I thank Senators KENNEDY and ENZI for their bipartisan work on this important legislation, and I urge my colleagues to support this conference report.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, as I understand, we have 9 minutes left. Am I correct?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from Ohio and 3 minutes to the Senator from Vermont, and I will take the last 3 minutes, and we will alternate with our Republican colleagues.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Chairman KENNEDY and Ranking Member ENZI for their leadership, as well as the staff, for their tireless work on the Head Start reauthorization bill. It is long overdue. It will help prepare thousands of low-income children for their transition into school and for their success later in life.

There is no greater investment, of course, that we can make than investing in our children. This legislation means an additional 8,000 low-income infants and toddlers younger than those who have traditionally been enrolled in Head Start will be eligible for the program. Teachers will receive more training, the critical training they need and the cost-of-living increases that they deserve. This legislation means expansion of the program to children whose families earn just above the poverty line. For tens of thousands of children in this country, this legislation gives them hope. It is a step forward, a major step forward.

Yesterday, unfortunately, the President vetoed the funding for Head Start. That is why we take a step forward today with this Head Start reauthorization, as the President took a step backward in vetoing the funding for Head Start. Budgets, we know, are about priorities. Whether it is a family budget, it speaks to your values; whether it is a Federal budget, it speaks to our values. Vetoing funding for Head Start, for medical research, and for job training as the President did yesterday, tells us something about his priorities.

I am pleased that on a bipartisan basis, by passing legislation that expands Head Start to reach more low-income children, this Senate is saying our priorities are different. I hope that together we can override the President's veto and fulfill the promise inherent in the Head Start Program.

I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their good work on this Head Start reauthorization. We should move forward.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Almost 14 minutes.

Mr. ENZI. I yield 7 minutes to the Senator from Georgia, who has always played a tremendous role in this piece of work with his staff person Glee Smith, and he brings with him a world of knowledge from Georgia where he served as the chief school official there. They set some precedent-setting things at all levels of education while he was doing that, and he did it in conjunction with former Senator Zell Miller, who was Governor at that time. I

yield 7 minutes to the Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I wish to thank Ranking Member ENZI for his kind remarks and his tremendous dedication and commitment to bringing this conference report to the floor. I particularly want to thank Senator KENNEDY from Massachusetts, who is a consummate legislator by anybody's definition and a very committed individual in the development of our youth and the betterment of education.

As Senator ENZI said, about a decade ago I served as chairman of the State Board of Education in the administration of my predecessor in this seat who was then Governor Zell Miller. Those were the years that the breakthrough brain research came forward and illustrated conclusively that there is a direct correlation between early childhood development and the potential development of a person as an adult. We worked very hard together in Georgia to improve the plight of all Georgians and did everything we could to develop new programs. One of them that we developed was none other than the 4-year-old prekindergarten program which now is available to every child in Georgia. It is a program that builds on the fact that the earlier you can begin instruction, the earlier you can improve the environment and the atmosphere in which a child is exposed, the better that child is going to do.

It is critical for us, if we want to turn around the trend in terms of dropouts in this country, to see to it that we enhance and enrich the lives of every single student who is going to go to our public schools.

Mr. President, it is conclusive that the environment in which a child lives in their early years—that to which they are exposed, their nutrition, the total environment—is directly a correlation to their ability to learn. The Head Start Program is designed to get to those children most in need for quality support, for uplift, for a greater self-esteem, and for a leg up, a chance to get to go to a 4-year-old prekindergarten program or to a kindergarten program ready to learn.

USA Today ran an article about a week ago talking about America's dropout factories, and it enumerated schools in almost every State, with dropout rates of 40, 50, 60 percent. If you looked at the facts around those articles and those schools, you would find a common denominator: Those schools' children came from the least of backgrounds, with the least support, and from the poorest of environments. We have an obligation to ourselves and, as Senator ALEXANDER said, America's future to see to it that every American child arrives at kindergarten or first grade ready to learn. The advancement of programs such as Head Start will make that happen.

I commend Senators ALEXANDER, ENZI, and KENNEDY, Congressmen MILLER and McKEON, and all those who worked on this important legislation. I

urge every Member to cast a favorable vote in favor of a better atmosphere for our young children to grow up in, better exposure to those things that help them go to school ready to learn, and turn around the paradigm on dropouts in the United States.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I wish to add my voice to the others and thank Senator KENNEDY and Senator ENZI for their leadership on this issue and for the cooperative, bipartisan relationship we see on that committee, which makes it perhaps the most productive committee in the Senate.

As others have said, this is a very important day forward for the children of our country. Right now, I am thinking about the Head Start workers in Vermont who do such an extraordinary job in reaching out and providing for low-income kids throughout our State, and I know the same is true throughout this country. They are dedicated people, they are underpaid and overworked, but they do it for the love of the children. I very much appreciate all they are doing.

Mr. President, while this is, in fact, an important day forward, it is significant to point out again that this is an authorization bill, not an appropriations bill. We had the disappointment just the other day of the President vetoing the Labor-HHS bill, which includes Head Start. My hope is that in the very near future we are going to have a strong Labor bill, with adequate funding for Head Start, but more significantly—and this is an issue I will talk about until the cows come home—we have to change our national priorities with regard to how we treat the children of this country.

Every Member of Congress, every American should be deeply ashamed and embarrassed that in this great country, we have, by far, the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world. The figures are that between 18 and 20 percent of our children live in poverty. As other speakers have pointed out, if children at an early age don't get the intellectual and emotional nourishment they need, they are not going to do well in life. It is not an accident that at the same time we have the highest rate of childhood poverty, we also have the highest rate of incarceration of any major nation on Earth. So we don't take adequate care of our children, and, lo and behold, we are shocked when they end up behind bars, and we spend \$50,000 to \$70,000 for each person who is incarcerated. It makes a lot more sense to me—and I hope my colleagues agree—that we put that money up front to make sure all of our kids get the opportunities they are entitled to as young Americans.

The truth is that while this bill is a significant step forward—and I applaud all those who built it—as Senator KENNEDY indicated earlier, only one-half of

the eligible children in America today, because of inadequate funding, are able to get into the Head Start Program. So this is an important step forward. I congratulate all who have made this day possible. We have a long way to go to, in fact, keep the faith with the children of America.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Wyoming and the Senator from Massachusetts. I rise to express my appreciation for their excellent work on this legislation. It has been a long time in gestation. I think it reflects their commitment to legislating in a bipartisan and effective way that the bill is now at this stage. I congratulate them.

I think anybody who has been exposed to Head Start is impressed by the program. There have been studies and reports of that which can be done to improve the program, and hopefully this bill will work in that direction. But the underlying idea of giving low-income kids the ability to come into an atmosphere where they get nurturing, good nutrition, and now, because of this bill, where they get starting blocks for learning how to deal with an academic program is totally appropriate and something that has succeeded.

If you look at what we are facing as a nation, as discussed here at considerable length—I heard the Senator from Tennessee make an excellent statement on the needs of education, and what our country really needs is the ability to bring into the educational mainstream children who today, unfortunately, are not able or do not come to school with the necessary skills to compete with some of their fellow students. Head Start gives those children that opportunity. It gives low-income kids the ability to start kindergarten and get into the first grade with an understanding of how, first, to be social and deal with an atmosphere where there are other children; secondly, to have the necessary nutrition to get through the day and be able to learn; and third, begin the building blocks of learning. This program works, and it has worked. It is something that should be continued to be supported by the Federal Government and also by the local communities that stand behind Head Start.

That is one of the great things about Head Start. In my experience, when you go to a local Head Start center in New Hampshire—or anywhere—as chairman of the committee, I visited Head Start centers all across the country. They are usually community-oriented events. Behind those teachers and committed people, who are willing to spend the day with the children and try to make their lives better during the day, there are usually a lot of volunteers and people from the community stepping up to also make those programs work well.

So Head Start is one of the success stories and one of the things we need as one of the building blocks in order to continue to make America a great place to live and give people the ability to participate in the American dream.

Again, I thank the Senators for orchestrating this effort.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Who yields time? The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, it has been a pleasure and an honor to get to work on this bill and to work with people on both sides of the aisle. You can see the unanimity from the Republican side and the Democratic side in making sure the bill came to pass.

As I mentioned before, we have had a lot of false starts trying to get Head Start done. This time, we have gotten through the process. Today, we will have a positive vote and send it to the President for signature. I think you can tell from the debate that it has been a very positive process.

The only distinction appears to be the few comments we have had about the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. I don't want to get into that issue because it will take a long time to discuss it. I ask unanimous consent to have the Wall Street Journal article from today called "Return to Spender" printed in the RECORD to counter some of the things talked about. It wasn't Head Start that he vetoed; it was the entire Labor-HHS budget.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

RETURN TO SPENDER

Congressional Democrats spent the fall preparing for their budget confrontation with the White House, and the strategy they seem to have settled on is futility. They knew President Bush would veto their first appropriations bill, as he did yesterday, and they also knew they'd lack the votes for an override. If they're wondering why the bottom's fallen out of their approval ratings, here it is.

Mr. Bush said the bill exceeds "reasonable and responsible levels for discretionary spending," and he was being too kind. Ostensibly the \$606 billion "minibus"—combining funding for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education—is "only" \$12.2 billion beyond the President's budget request for discretionary spending. But that's more than half of the \$22 billion that Democrats want to spend for 2008 above the Administration's top line. (That \$22 billion, by the way, swells to at least \$205 billion in additional outlays over five years.)

Democrats are already feigning outrage. House Appropriations kingpin David Obey complained, "There has been virtually no criticism of its contents," and if he's only referring to Congress, he's not far off. The bill marks a return to Capitol Hill's earmarks-as-usual spending culture, assuming it ever abated. There are more than 2,200 earmarks worth some \$1 billion.

The pork includes \$1.5 million for the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute and \$2.2 million for the AFL-CIO Appalachian Council. There's \$500,000 for a "virtual herbarium" in New York and \$50,000 for a Utah "ice center." Also check off \$1 million for the Clinton School of Public Service in Lit-

tle Rock, and another \$1 million for the Thomas Daschle Center for Public Service and Representative Democracy at South Dakota State University. Plus the usual assorted millions for art centers, aquariums, aviation and jazz museums, and so forth.

The Members also reverted to habit by using a House-Senate conference to "air-drop" \$155 million in earmarks that were not included in earlier editions—in violation of the 2006 ethics "reform." The conference also clandestinely removed a provision barring federal funding for the "hippies museum" near Woodstock. All of this from Democrats who rode into the majority promising to restore "fiscal discipline."

Mr. Obey was especially instructive in a speech immediately before the final House vote: "I would ask every serious-minded person in this body, if they really think there is a chance of a snowball in Hades that Members' earmarks on either side of the aisle will survive if we wind up at the President's level of funding." He concluded: "The fate of every project . . . is in your hands."

The Democrats were desperate for a veto-proof majority, and for the sake of their earmarks some Republicans were content to go along. The pork, of course, was cover for much larger domestic spending excesses, including a \$2.4 billion budget gimmick for "advance appropriations" designed to circumvent Democratic "pay as you go" budget rules. Thankfully, enough GOP Members realized it, and maybe a few even hoped to recover their credibility on spending.

Since there aren't enough votes to override Mr. Bush, it's back to the drawing board. Maybe next time Democrats should try something new—say, spending less money.

Mr. ENZI. I hope the vote today will display the unanimity we have had while working on this bill. I congratulate the Senator from Massachusetts for the way he is running the committee. We have not just done hearings on things—hearings are a little more divisive than the other mechanism, which has been his morning coffees. In hearings, the two sides bring people to testify, and we kind of beat up on each other's witnesses. In the coffees he has held, we get to bring in a bunch of people and hear what they think. We have the interaction of one person who has had experience, and he talks to another person who has had experience, and they talk about how the two experiences might come together. That has been helpful on this bill, as well as the other ones, the bookends I mentioned. This being the first part of the book-end, and the next one we will be working on is No Child Left Behind.

We have already done the Higher Education Act on this side. I look forward to conferencing that and getting on to the Workforce Investment Act, which passed this body twice already but never has been conferenced. Our work is still cut out for us, but this is a day to celebrate the good work done on both sides of the aisle.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I thank my friend and colleague from Wyoming. He believes we ought to listen to experts before we actually legislate, which was a rather dramatic

thought to many around here. He certainly is right. He reminds us of our unfinished business in terms of higher education and the workforce legislation. We are strongly committed, and we will get a response on that.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—H. CON. RES. 258

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that upon the adoption of the conference report to accompany H.R. 1429, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H. Con. Res. 258, a correcting resolution; that the concurrent resolution be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KENNEDY. Finally, I would take a few moments to mention the staff who worked on this bill. I want to personally mention those who have worked so hard on this legislation. Some have been working on this for 4 years. I will not get into the reasons for that. This has been a very long and, in the past, contentious piece of legislation and without them, there is no way we could have completed this bill.

I would like to thank Michael Myers, Carmel Martin, Roberto Rodriguez, David Johns, Lily Clark, Liz Maher, and Raquel Alvarenga from my staff.

I would like to thank Katherine Graham Hildum of Senator DODD's staff; Janelle Krishnamoorthy of Senator HARKIN's staff; Mildred Otero of Senator CLINTON's staff; Michael Yudin of Senator BINGAMAN's staff; Robin Juliano of Senator MIKULSKI's staff; Seth Gerson of Senator REED's staff; Kathryn Young of Senator MURRAY's staff; Will Jawando of Senator BROWN's staff; Huck Gutman of Senator SANDERS' staff; and Steve Robinson of Senator OBAMA's staff.

This has been a bipartisan process all the way. I would also like to thank Senator ENZI's wonderful staff, specifically Katherine McGuire, Beth Buehlmann, Lindsay Hunsicker, and Adam Briddell.

I would also like to thank David Cleary and Sarah Rittling of Senator ALEXANDER's staff; Celia Sims of Senator BURR's staff; Juliann Andreen of Senator HATCH's staff; Allison Dembeck of Senator GREGG's staff; Elizabeth Floyd of Senator COBURN's staff; Karen McCarthy of Senator MURKOWSKI's staff; Suzanne Singleterry of Senator ALLARD's staff; Glee Smith of Senator ISAKSON's staff; and Alison Anway of Senator ROBERTS' staff.

It is important to mention the work done by our colleagues in the House and I would like to thank Ruth Freidman of Congressman MILLER's staff; James Bergeron, Kristen Duncan and Susan Ross of Congressman McKEON's staff; Lloyd Horwich of Congressman KILDEE's staff and Jessica Gross of Congressman CASTLE's staff for all of their work on this legislation.

I would like to thank especially Roberto Rodriguez and David Johns who

have taken the lead on Head Start in my office. Their good work has made all the difference. I know Roberto is especially pleased to see the Senate and House pass this conference report, as he has worked on this legislation for several years now. I commend him for his expertise, diligence, good nature and all of his efforts.

Mr. President, finally, the Head Start Program reaches the neediest children in this country. It reaches them to help and assist by providing health care, teaching proper nutrition, and by supporting proper development of cognitive abilities to ensure that children are ready to successfully transition to school.

Head Start is targeted to the neediest children in this country. Even with the small numbers we reach—we only reach a million, and there are 4 million poor children who are between ages 0 and 5—we see the difference it makes. Head Start raises them to a level playing ground. That is what our country is really about—trying to raise people to a level playing ground. Head Start alone does not guarantee success, but it gives them the opportunity to be successful.

If we have a group in our society that needs this kind of support, it is our children. As pointed out in this debate, through no fault of their own many children are born into difficult and challenging circumstances. As a nation we have a responsibility to get them up to a point where they can succeed in school and in life. That is what Head Start is about—a recognition that our Nation believes that children who are living in poverty, in some of the most challenging circumstances, should have the opportunity to be on a level playing field.

Finally, there is one thing we have learned in the area of education; that is, the more resources are targeted to early education, the better the opportunities these children have to succeed.

In this reauthorization we have taken advantage of the lessons we have learned from Head Start's successful history and built upon excellent recommendations made by members of our committee. This is a very solid and important piece of legislation that will make a difference in the lives of millions of children. I urge the Senate to support it.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following three letters in support of the Head Start reauthorization conference report be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD following my remarks on the conference report.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION,
Alexandria, VA, November 13, 2007.

Hon. EDWARD KENNEDY,
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pension, Washington, DC

DEAR CHAIRMAN KENNEDY: On behalf of the National Head Start Association, the children, parents, staff and teachers of Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and

the Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, the members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension for supporting the reauthorization of Head Start—truly a bipartisan effort and success story for America's premier preschool program, Head Start.

As the national association representing the Head Start community, we represent more than 1 million children and their families, 200,000 staff, and 2,700 Head Start programs. With the assistance of over 1 million volunteers, these programs comprehensively meet the early childhood development, educational, health and family needs of our children.

Head Start as you very well know, was established in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Baines Johnson's "Great Society" program, and is the most successful, longest running, national school readiness program in the United States. Head Start has served over 25 million preschool-age children, infants, toddlers, and pregnant women since its inception. Your successful reauthorization of Head Start signals the continued legacy for future low-income children and families.

The Head Start reauthorization bill is a lesson in bipartisan cooperation and leadership in addressing a critical priority need of our country—the preschool readiness of our children. In short, the "Improving Head Start Act" addresses income eligibility, where the working poor are supported and provided incentives to work; terminates the National Reporting System; helps more programs operate full-day and year round; reaffirms the accreditation of teachers in early childhood; provides expansion for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and American Indian/Alaskan Native populations; and underscores the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children.

Therefore, I call upon our longtime friends and supporters in the U.S. Congress to approve overwhelmingly the "Improving Head Start Act of 2007" and send it to the President for his signature.

Again, congratulations on your success and that of our children and families.

With great gratitude,

SARAH GREENE,
President and CEO.

FIGHT CRIME:

INVEST IN KIDS,

Washington, DC, November 14, 2007.

DEAR SENATORS KENNEDY, ENZI, DODD AND ALEXANDER: The over 3,500 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids know from the front lines—and the research—that investments in Head Start are critical to our nation's public safety. Head Start helps kids get a good start in life so that they avoid later criminality and grow up to become responsible citizens. But the maximum crime reduction impacts—and many other benefits of Head Start—can only occur when programs reach more of the at-risk kids and are comprehensive and of the highest quality.

We are pleased that the final conference report version of the Improving Head Start Act of 2007 (H.R. 1429) includes the following:

Funding authorization: We are pleased the bill includes increased funding authorizations in Fiscal Years (FY) 2008-2010, with "such sums" funding levels for FY11-FY12. A \$750 million increase in FY08—beyond the FY07 level—is needed to simply restore funding to the FY02 service level. And that level would only serve a small portion of the eligible, poor kids now left out of Head Start. These increases are an important first step in the right direction.

Teacher qualifications: We are pleased the bill includes a quality improvement requirement that 50% of classroom lead teachers

have at least a bachelor's degree by 2013. The requirement is crucial to Head Start program quality, since no peer-reviewed, scientific research study has found an early care and education program that demonstrated significant, long-term crime reduction and education results without a bachelor's degree teacher requirement.

Quality improvement set-aside: We are pleased the bill directs 40% of annual increases over the prior year's funding level to quality improvement, with half of those funds directed toward improved teacher compensation rates. Improved teacher compensation is critical to attracting and retaining better-educated individuals—who would otherwise flock to higher-paying opportunities, including K-12 schools.

Targeting to serve the poorest children: We are pleased the bill maintains Head Start's priority for serving the poorest, most at-risk children by ensuring that children living in poverty are served first as income eligibility is expanded to 130% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Early head start: We are pleased that bill adds flexibility for Head Start programs to serve zero-to-three-year-olds if they meet the Early Head Start quality standards. In addition, we are pleased that the bill directs half of new expansion funding toward Early Head Start enrollment increases.

The bill also includes several provisions that will continue to strengthen Head Start's quality:

No state block grants, state waivers, or state application authority that might have endangered current quality standards;

Training/technical assistance activities (including through a 2.5%–3% set-aside);

Strengthened research-based school readiness elements of Head Start (of course, it is critical to maintain and strengthen all eight of the domains of Head Start's outcomes framework);

Strengthened parent education and home visiting provisions;

A requirement that Head Start agencies utilize high-quality, research-based developmental screening tools to identify children with early emotional and behavioral problems, so kids can receive the treatment they need to prevent later delinquency;

Improvements in fiscal and program accountability among grantees, including improved monitoring and termination of grantees that are significantly and/or systematically deficient;

Enhanced outreach to at-risk kids;

Enhanced collaboration and coordination efforts requirements between local Head Start grantees and other early education providers through collaboration grants;

Increased state-level coordination through State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care;

The development of an integrated data collection system to provide complete information about children served by the programs and the services offered; and

Suspension of the National Reporting System, and provisions for any future assessment approaches to be based on the results the National Academy of Sciences study regarding appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically valid and reliable child assessments.

We appreciate the efforts of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the Education and Labor Committee to strengthen Head Start through this reauthorization legislation. This bill will benefit at-risk kids now and help ensure safer communities in the years to come. The result will be generations of disadvantaged children progressing toward school success and grad-

uation rather than later arrest and incarceration.

Sincerely,

DAVID S. KASS,
President.
MIRIAM A. ROLLIN,
Vice President.

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES WELCOME HEAD START RENEWAL

WASHINGTON (Nov. 14, 2007).—The nation's Community Action Agencies applaud the work of Senate and House conferees on Head Start reauthorization and look forward to passage of this national child development legislation later this week.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) administer 30 percent of Head Start grants and a third of all enrollments nationwide. Children and families participating in programs offered by CAAs also benefit from the comprehensive services offered by these organizations to help them secure housing, gain employment, and build assets to help them achieve economic security.

"Low-wage working families who turn to Community Action Agencies to prepare their children for school with Head Start leave with a variety of resources to help them improve the lives of the entire family," said National Community Action Foundation Executive Director David Bradley.

The conference agreement expands access for more eligible children, increases classroom quality, enhances the Head Start workforce, strengthens governance and provides more tools for greater accountability.

"It is commendable that this Congress has focused so much of its agenda on domestic issues that are important to American voters, and, in this instance, has been able to do so with strong bipartisan cooperation to assist low-wage working families," Bradley said.

"Once these important enhancements are adopted for the Head Start program, we hope that Congress will next turn its attention to the remaining Human Services initiatives: the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Community Services Block Grant," he said. "These programs make key investments in the daily lives of low-wage working American families, and are long overdue for reauthorization. NCAF hopes its proposals to strengthen and modernize these programs will be considered soon."

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield back whatever time remains, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the conference report to accompany H.R. 1429.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. DODD), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. LOTT. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 95, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 409 Leg.]

YEAS—95

Akaka	Dorgan	McConnell
Alexander	Durbin	Menendez
Allard	Ensign	Mikulski
Barrasso	Enzi	Murkowski
Baucus	Feingold	Murray
Bayh	Feinstein	Nelson (FL)
Bennett	Graham	Nelson (NE)
Bingaman	Grassley	Pryor
Bond	Gregg	Reed
Boxer	Hagel	Reid
Brown	Harkin	Roberts
Brownback	Hatch	Rockefeller
Bunning	Hutchison	Salazar
Burr	Inhofe	Sanders
Byrd	Inouye	Schumer
Cantwell	Isakson	Sessions
Cardin	Johnson	Shelby
Carper	Kennedy	Smith
Casey	Kerry	Snowe
Chambliss	Klobuchar	Specter
Coburn	Kohl	Stabenow
Cochran	Kyl	Stevens
Coleman	Landrieu	Sununu
Collins	Lautenberg	Tester
Conrad	Leahy	Thune
Corker	Levin	Vitter
Cornyn	Lieberman	Voinovich
Craig	Lincoln	Warner
Crapo	Lott	Webb
DeMint	Lugar	Whitehouse
Dole	Martinez	Wyden
Domenici	McCaskill	

NOT VOTING—5

Biden	Dodd	Obama
Clinton	McCain	

The conference report was agreed to.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

● Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I rise to applaud the Senate passage of the Head Start Improvement for School Readiness Act of 2007—a product of hard work by my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

For more than 40 years, Head Start has provided comprehensive services to poor families—health, nutrition, academic skills, family literacy, and more—ensuring children get the cognitive, social-emotional, and academic skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and later in life. In New York, almost 50,000 families benefit from Head Start services.

This bill takes several steps forward in strengthening Head Start programs across the country. It dramatically expands Early Head Start—a program created under the Clinton administration to reach children from birth to age 3. Though we have decades of research underscoring the importance of this stage of development, Early Head Start has only been able to reach 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. This conference report doubles Early Head Start funding from 10 percent to 20 percent to ensure more infants and toddlers receive services and arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

The conference report increases Head Start authorization by 6 percent in the first year and 4 percent in the following 2 years. For years, our Head Start providers have had to make difficult decisions in the face of President Bush's budgets that have included flat-funding or funding cuts, as well as the effects of inflation. Many centers had to cut back on comprehensive services that Head Start families rely on. In

New York, programs have been forced to eliminate vital transportation services. This much needed increase in funding will finally give Head Start agencies the resources they need to maintain enrollment, improve quality service levels, and provide for the necessary cost of living increase for teachers.

The Head Start Improvement for School Readiness Act of 2007 enhances teacher quality. Research has shown that the right teaching training and successful instruction lead to successful Head Start programs. Right now, about a third of Head Start teachers hold a bachelor's degree. This bill will help increase the skills and training of more Head Start teachers and increase the quality of instruction for Head Start children. I am also pleased this conference report retains the important roles parents have always maintained in Head Start programs, including ensuring parents' voices are heard in Head Start's daily operations.

The bill also increases a portion of the income eligibility guidelines from the current 100 percent of poverty level to children in families with income up to 130 percent of poverty. This is particularly important for States like New York, where the cost of living is higher than most States'. Many programs need flexibility in serving these families earning just slightly above the poverty line, including the ability to assist families who have moved off welfare and are now working and struggling to make ends meet. For New York City, this provision means thousands more children will be able to participate in Head Start programs. This bill will give those hard working families support as they become self sustainable.

This bill also terminates use of the National Reporting System, NRS. I have expressed my concern about this test for several years now. In 2003, I joined my colleague Senator BINGAMAN in offering an amendment during the markup of Head Start to suspend NRS. In 2005, the Government Accountability Office produced a report underscoring our concerns when it called into question the validity and reliability of the NRS. I am pleased this bill suspends the unfair NRS test and asks the National Academy of Sciences to make recommendations on an appropriate assessment for young children.

Head Start is critical to ensuring our most vulnerable children enter school ready to learn. Head Start has provided comprehensive services to low-income families—from health and nutrition, to academic skills and family literacy. I am pleased that we were able to move this bill forward in this session in a bipartisan fashion. The Senate passage of this bill is a victory for our neediest children and the Head Start community that serves them.●

Mr. KENNEDY. I move to reconsider the vote and to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, H. Con. Res. 258 is adopted, and a motion to reconsider that vote is considered made and laid on the table.

The resolution (H. Con. Res. 258) was agreed to.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). Without objection, it is so ordered.

FARM, NUTRITION, AND BIOENERGY ACT OF 2007—Continued

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding that we are on the farm bill?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I send a cloture motion to the desk on the substitute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Harkin amendment No. 3500 (Substitute) to H.R. 2419, the farm bill.

Tom Harkin, Jon Tester, Daniel K. Inouye, Dick Durbin, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Bernard Sanders, Kent Conrad, Ben Cardin, Debbie Stabenow, Ben Nelson, Byron L. Dorgan, Max Baucus, Ken Salazar, Claire McCaskill, Bob Casey, Jr., Sherrod Brown.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send another cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 339, H.R. 2419, the Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act of 2007.

Tom Harkin, Harry Reid, Kent Conrad, Ben Nelson, Amy Klobuchar, Frank R. Lautenberg, Daniel K. Inouye, Bernard Sanders, Russell D. Feingold, Patty Murray, Claire McCaskill, Byron L. Dorgan, Max Baucus, John Kerry, Debbie Stabenow, Richard J. Durbin, Sherrod Brown.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I indicated this morning that sometime today, unless something changed, I would file a cloture motion on the Dorgan-Grassley

amendment and, as I have indicated, on the bill, which I have just done. I had a long conversation with the distinguished Senator from North Dakota. Very few people know the farm bill as well as he does. Certainly his partner in this amendment, Senator GRASSLEY—no one can dispute his knowledge of the farm bill.

It is the feeling of Senator DORGAN, after having conferred with Senator GRASSLEY, that it would not be in the interests of the Senate, the farm community, and the country to go forward on cloture on that amendment at this time. I have followed their suggestion and that is why I did not go forward with this.

Unless something is worked out, it appears very clear—we have heard the debate all day on the farm bill. Tremendously difficult, hard work has gone on. The bill was reported out of the Agriculture Committee. Every Senator there voted for it. There was not a recorded "no" vote, but that only says part of the story. The rest of the story is numerous Senators worked for weeks and weeks to arrive at a point where a bill could come out of that committee. It came out here to the floor. It came out last week and we have tried to move forward on it. That we have been unable to do that was unfortunate.

I hope Senators, when they are called upon to vote cloture on this matter, would understand that the work of the committee was very good work. Does that mean there should not be amendments to improve it? Probably not. But if we did nothing more than pass the bill that came out of that committee and took it to conference with the House-passed bill, we would be way ahead of the game. I hope that is what Senators will understand.

I am confident virtually every Democratic Senator will vote for cloture on the farm bill, even though there are many Democratic Senators whose No. 1 industry in the State is not agriculture. But they recognize that agriculture is an important business for this country. It is an important business for this country for so many reasons, one of which is the farming and ranching industry in this country is exemplary. We are able to compete with the rest of the world, without any question. We have modern techniques that have gone into farming that have made our production extraordinary.

We now have, as represented by Senator TESTER from Montana—one example—we have now a thriving business in America of organic farming. There are many people in this Senate who, when they go shopping, will only buy organic produce. That is part of this bill. Part of this bill recognizes that. It is very unfortunate that we have been stopped from going forward on this bill because people want to vote on immigration matters, they want to vote on tax matters, they want to vote on issues that are not related. I went over that entire list this morning, of all the nonrelevant, totally nongermane amendments that have been given to us.