

lost. These accidents have raised a host of other needs: cameras on trains, sufficient crew size, improved rail inspections, close-call reporting systems, redundant signal protection, alerters on rail cabs, speed restrictions, better Federal oversight, and safer highway-rail grade crossings.

In the committee, I filed amendments that also advance these reforms. Those reforms must be a part of any real rail safety discussion. If we are even to consider a PTC deadline extension, it is imperative we take up other well-known measures that can improve safety while we work toward full PTC implementation. I appreciate the commitment from the chairman and ranking member of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee to work with me to advance these reforms. I also appreciate the committee including a modified version of one of my amendments in the bill that passed out of the committee. Although I withdrew my other amendments in the committee, I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to improve this bill further. I am confident that together we can achieve important reforms and truly advance safety for all who depend on rail.

EVERY CHILD ACHIEVES ACT OF 2015

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of my opening remarks at the markup of the Every Child Achieves Act.

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

EVERY CHILD ACHIEVES ACT OF 2015

We are meeting today to write legislation that will fix the problems with “No Child Left Behind,” the federal law causing confusion and anxiety in our country’s 100,000 public schools.

Working together the last few months, Senator Murray and I have found a consensus about the urgent need to fix these problems as well as a remarkable consensus about how to fix them.

That consensus is this: Continue the law’s important measurements of academic progress of students but restore to states, school districts, classroom teachers and parents the responsibility for deciding what to do about improving student achievement. This change should produce fewer tests and more appropriate ways to measure student achievement. It is the most effective path to advance higher state standards, better teaching, and real accountability.

We have drafted a bill based upon this consensus which we will offer as a starting point for our deliberations.

The problems with No Child Left Behind have been created by a combination of presidential action and congressional inaction. In 2001, President Bush and Congress enacted “No Child Left Behind,” requiring a total of 17 tests between reading, math and science during a child’s elementary and secondary education. The results of these tests must be disaggregated and reported according to race, ethnicity, gender, disability and other measures so parents, teachers and the community could see which children are being

left behind. The law also created federal standards for whether a school is succeeding or failing, what a state or school district must do about that failure, and whether a teacher was highly qualified to teach in a classroom.

If fixing No Child Left Behind were a standardized test, Congress would have earned a failing grade for each of the last seven years. “No Child Left Behind” expired in 2007 but Congress has been unable to agree on how to reauthorize it. As a result, the law’s original requirements have stayed in place and gradually became unworkable. This has caused almost all of America’s public schools to be classified as failing under the terms of the law. To avoid this bizarre result, President Obama’s Education Secretary offered waivers from the terms of the law. But the Secretary required each of the 42 states currently operating under waivers to adopt certain academic standards, take prescribed steps to help failing schools, and to evaluate teachers in a defined way.

So much new federal control of local schools has produced a backlash against “Common Core” academic standards, teacher evaluation, and against tests in general. Governors and chief state school officers complain about federal overreach. Infuriated teachers say that the U.S. Department of Education has become a “National Human Resources Department or, in effect, a national school board.”

In each of the last two Congresses, this Committee produced bills to fix No Child Left Behind. Basically, these bills divided our committee along party lines. Even so, two Congresses ago, Sens. Enzi, Kirk and I voted with the Democratic majority to report a bill out of committee so that the full senate could act. In the last Congress, the committee majority passed a partisan bill without any Republican votes, but I committed to support Chairman Harkin in taking the bill to the floor if there would be an open amendment process. Unfortunately, these bills never reached the senate floor.

In January, Sen. Murray suggested that the two of us work together to try to bridge the partisan divide and to recommend to the full committee a solution. I accepted her suggestion and I want to thank her for it. We have listened carefully to our senate colleagues, to teachers, principals, governors, chief state school officers, students and parents and the business and civil rights communities—and to each other.

I especially want to thank our staffs—Evan Schatz (pronounced SHOTS), Sarah Bolton, and Amanda Beaumont on Sen. Murray’s staff, and David Cleary, Peter Oppenheim, and Lindsay Fryer on my staff—for their hard work and the way that they worked, trying to strip aside the rhetoric and look for real solutions. I believe they, and we, have succeeded in that.

We found that no issue stirred as much controversy as testing. Our proposal maintains the reading, math and science tests and disaggregated reporting requirements established in 2001. The more we studied the problem, the issue seems not to be the 17 federal tests. A third grader, for example, is required to take only one test in math and one in reading during one year. Denver Public Schools superintendent Tom Boasberg testified before the committee that he’d like to keep math and reading tests to a total of 4 hours a year—that’s about what they are right now in Denver, according to our calculations.

Instead, the problem is the federal government’s accountability system for what to do about the results of these tests. This federal accountability system has greatly contributed to the exploding number of state and local tests.

Because of this, our proposal would end federal test-based accountability and restore state and local responsibility for creating systems holding schools and teachers accountable. State accountability systems must meet limited federal guidelines, including challenging academic standards for all students, but the federal government is prohibited from determining or approving state standards or even incentivizing states into adopting specific standards. In other words, whether a state adopts Common Core is entirely that state’s decision. This transfer of responsibility is why we believe our proposal will result in fewer and more appropriate tests.

Our proposal allows, but does not require, states to develop and implement teacher evaluation systems that link student achievement to teacher performance. States will be allowed to use federal funds to implement evaluations the way they see fit.

States will determine their lowest-performing schools and receive federal funds to assist those schools but the federal government will not mandate specific steps to fix those schools.

Sens. Murray and Isakson will propose and I will support an amendment for competitive planning grants to help states expand quality early childhood education by addressing the fragmentation of current early childhood federal, state, local, public and private programs.

In conclusion, I have this request for members of the committee: please exercise restraint and help us get to a result.

If we senators were students in a classroom, none of us would expect to receive a passing grade for unfinished work. Seven years is long enough to consider how to fix No Child Left Behind. The members of this committee are thoroughly familiar with the issues. Twenty of our 22 members were on the committee during the last Congress when we considered and reported a bill. Sixteen of our members were here in the previous Congress. Over the last 6 years and 3 months we have had 27 hearings on elementary and secondary education.

Knowing this, Sen. Murray and I have exercised restraint. Neither of us insisted on putting into our base bill every proposal about which we feel strongly, although we will offer some of these as amendments when we reach the senate floor. We know that to get a result we have to achieve consensus, which means more than sixty votes. We also know that in conference we will need to agree with the House of Representatives, which is of one political party, and then with the President, who is of another.

During our committee discussions, any germane amendment will be in order to the bipartisan agreement Sen. Murray and I will offer. Any amendment related to K-12 education will be in order on the senate floor. Nevertheless, I would ask each member of this committee to exercise restraint in search of a result. If we can agree on most things, let’s put aside the other things until another debate and another day.

And I would ask one other thing: in offering your amendments, please keep in mind the advice we received earlier this year from Carol Burris, New York’s 2013 High School principal of the Year:

“I ask that your committee remember that the American public school system was built on the belief that local communities cherish their children and have the right and responsibility, within sensible limits, to determine how they are schooled.

While the federal government has a very special role in ensuring that our students do not experience discrimination based on who they are or what their disability may be, Congress is not a National School Board.

Although our locally elected school boards may not be perfect, they represent one of the purest forms of democracy we have. Bad ideas in the small do damage in the small and are easily corrected. Bad ideas at the federal level result in massive failure and are far harder to fix."

In other words, our well-intended guidance from Washington is usually not as effective as a decision made in the home, classroom, and community by those closest to the children.

What we heard over and over again from Democrats as well as Republicans was that while continuing measurements of academic progress are important in holding schools and teachers accountable, we should respect the judgments of those closest to the children and leave to them most decisions about how to help 3.4 million teachers help 50 million children in 100,000 public schools improve student achievement.

Fifty years ago on Palm Sunday, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A good way to celebrate that anniversary is to fix the problems with the most recent version of the act so that all our children can have the best possible opportunity to learn what they need to know and be able to do in an increasingly complex world.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO BISHOP WALTER SCOTT THOMAS

• Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, this Sunday, I will be honored and pleased to participate in a celebration of Bishop Walter Scott Thomas' 40th anniversary as pastor of the New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, MD. Bishop Thomas is one of the great leaders of the faith community in Baltimore. When he became pastor of New Psalmist Baptist Church in 1975, the congregation numbered 200 or so people. Today, the church has over 7,000 active members. There are Bible study classes held every day of the week, a 3-year discipleship program, leadership classes, and a school for future ministers. New Psalmist has a nationally televised broadcast, "Empowering Disciples," that can be viewed locally on WJZ-TV and on the Word Network. There are three worship services on Sundays and one on Wednesday. New Psalmist is committed to caring for community and for God's creation. Classes are held to teach members how to Go Green and conserve God's creation. Every year, the church helps over 500 families at Christmas, and feeds 100 disadvantaged families each month.

Bishop Thomas is known as a pastor's pastor. He makes himself available as a mentor and source of strength for other pastors. Ten years ago, 28 sons and daughters of the New Psalmist Baptist Church who pastor churches across the Nation gathered and voted unanimously to elect Bishop Thomas as president of Kingdom Association of Covenant Pastors and to the office of bishop. Later that year, Bishop Thomas was elevated to the office of bishop and presiding prelate of The Kingdom

Association of Covenant Pastors. That historic occasion was held at the First Mariner Arena in front of over 10,000 people. The Kingdom Association of Covenant Pastors is a newly established association consisting of men and women who have been influenced by the ministry of New Psalmist Baptist Church and Bishop Thomas.

Bishop Thomas isn't content just to lead New Psalmist Baptist Church. He served as the president of the Hampton University Minister's Conference from 1999 to 2002. Under his leadership, conference attendance doubled. Bishop Thomas is also an inspirational author of books such as "Spiritual Navigation for the 21st Century" and "Good Meat Makes Its Own Gravy". He is the editor of "Outstanding Black Sermons, Volume 4". Bishop Thomas received his bachelor of science degree from the University of Maryland in economics. He earned his master of divinity degree from the Howard University School of Religion in Washington, DC and a doctor of ministry degree from Saint Mary's Seminary & University in Baltimore. In addition to his earned degrees, Bishop Thomas was bestowed with an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Virginia Seminary and Bethune Cookman College. Bishop Thomas and his wife and committed partner in ministry, Patricia, have three children, Joi, Walter Jr., and Joshua.

New Psalmist Baptist Church has a rich history that spans over 100 years. The church was founded by Rev. Junius Gray in 1899 as the Right Independent Freewill Baptist Church. The first members—fewer than 20 people—met in the basement of a house on Russell Terrace. In 1901, the church purchased and moved to a two-story building at 1102 Parrish Alley. In 1911, the church, renamed Psalmist Baptist Church, purchased and remodeled property at Riggs Avenue and Woodyear Street. Reverend Gray pastored Psalmist Baptist Church for 47 years.

Rev. Frederick C. Atkins was called to pastor Psalmist Baptist Church in June 1948. Under his leadership, membership grew and, because of that growth, the church purchased and moved to a new building at Druid Hill and North Avenues in 1954. The \$56,000 mortgage was paid in full and burned in 1960 and the church was renamed the New Psalmist Baptist Church. Reverend Atkins served as pastor until his sudden death on March 16, 1974. Bishop Thomas, who was called to proclaim the Word of God in 1973 under the anointed leadership of Dr. Harold Carter, pastor of the New Shiloh Baptist Church in Baltimore, took over in 1975. In 1978, New Psalmist moved from Druid Hill and North Avenues to Cathedral and Franklin Streets. While in downtown Baltimore, New Psalmist grew tremendously. In 1994, New Psalmist broke ground and 2 years later, moved from Franklin and Cathedral Street to Old Frederick Road, a multi-million dollar worship center and ministry complex on 19 acres of

land. The church continued to grow and in the fall of 2010, it moved into a brand new 4,000-seat worship facility.

New Psalmist Baptist Church is a vibrant and welcoming place. Past attendees have included the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the Reverend T.D. Jakes, former President Bill Clinton in 1998, and then-Senator Barack Obama in 2007. New Psalmist Baptist Church members walk in faith and work together for the common good. The church provides job training and a fitness and health ministry; donates school supplies to children; ministers to the deaf, homeless, and prisoners and their families; hosts blood drives; partners with 12 schools across Maryland to help students, parents, and school staff members succeed in their educational mission; and is an accredited organization under the United Nations Environment Program, which seeks to create global policies that will protect our planet.

I encourage my Senate colleagues to join me in congratulating Bishop Thomas and his family and friends on his 40th pastoral anniversary at New Psalmist Baptist Church and sending along best wishes to all the members of New Psalmist who know, as President John F. Kennedy said at his inauguration 54 years ago, "that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."•

TRIBUTE TO DR. GLENN STEELE

• Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the career of Dr. Glenn Steele upon his retirement from Geisinger Health System. Teddy Roosevelt once said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." In his 14 years as CEO of Geisinger, Glenn Steele has been the embodiment of that idea.

Geisinger is located in Danville, PA, and is the largest rural health services organization in the country, serving more than 3 million residents throughout 48 counties. Annually, Geisinger provides over \$400 million in community support, helping to meet the needs of all Pennsylvanians in the area, regardless of their ability to pay. Under Dr. Steele, Geisinger has been a leader in delivery system reform, improving quality of care and population health while reducing cost.

Dr. Steele is a trailblazer in the health care field. With a medical degree from New York University School of Medicine and a doctorate in microbiology from Lund University in Sweden, Dr. Steele brings a unique perspective to managing a health care system. He has authored and coauthored over 460 scientific and professional articles and has been widely recognized for his investigations into the treatment of liver cancer and colorectal cancer surgery. He is also a visionary in the area of health care delivery and financing, one of the achievements for which Geisinger is most well-known. Since