

be a part of the culmination of this effort, but they are men and women who have been part of this battle for decades, truly decades. The number of trips they have made to Washington, DC, over the years, the doors they have knocked on, and the efforts they have contributed to are considerable.

When I start to name names, I think of Tara Sweeney and the folks who have been there year in and year out, those who have been supportive by traveling here and those who call and those who write.

It is gratifying, it is heartwarming, and it is a reality that one can never say thank you enough for the efforts that you have made over the years. To know that you spoke as Alaskans, your voices have been heard, and that Congress has finally listened is, indeed, gratifying.

Of course, we would not have reached this point without two particular Alaskans—the ones I am proud to serve with here in our delegation. DON YOUNG, the dean of the House and Congressman for all Alaska, has single-handedly kept this issue alive in the House for a generation. He reminds me that it has been 13 times now that he has passed it out of the House. To be able to recognize his extraordinary work is, indeed, a pleasure and an honor. And, of course, my friend, my very able partner in the Senate, Senator DAN SULLIVAN, was an incredible partner in this effort, and I thank him greatly for his work.

I also recognize that it is not just the delegation present who needs to be thanked. As I have said, this has been a decades-long battle. This has been a generational battle. We are standing in the footsteps of those who have preceded us, including my father, Frank Murkowski, who was chairman of the Energy Committee and at a point in time had advanced this, only to see it fail at the very end. And, of course, my dear friend, my mentor, one who helped give me such great guidance over the years was our former Senator, Ted Stevens.

Yesterday, you may have noticed I was wearing some unusual earrings. When my friend Ted, the former Senator Stevens, had a serious matter in front of him, he wanted the rest of his colleagues to know that, by gosh, he was serious that day, and this was an issue to be taken seriously, and he would don a Hulk tie. It was somewhat legendary around here. I am not one to wear ties, but after finding a nice pair of Hulk earrings, it seemed to me only appropriate to wear them on a day that would acknowledge the work of extraordinary Alaskans who went before me. I think, today, Uncle Ted is smiling and happy, and he is probably wearing his Hulk tie.

This is a big moment for Alaska. There is a spirit and an optimism that I am taking home right now that I think we haven't seen in years. I think it is worth noting that today is winter solstice. This is the shortest day of the

year—today and tomorrow. In Alaska, it is the darkest day of the year. I mentioned yesterday the effort we have seen from the Senate, which, hopefully, we will finalize shortly, is one that will bring a brightness and an energy to the people of Alaska. For that, I thank my colleagues. I thank the many Alaskans who have supported us in this epic battle, and I thank all those who have helped to make it possible.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EDUCATION

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, unlike most of my colleagues, the time I spent here in the Senate represents the sum total of my experience in elected office. For most of my life I approached politics and public policy from a very different perspective. I tried to be an educated citizen who understood how the issues being debated here in Washington affected me, my family, my neighbors, and those in my State and my country. I tried to be an advocate for the values I believed in—honesty in public discourse, for sure, but also fairness, justice, and the idea that in America we are all in this together. I tried to be an activist, putting my voice and my energy behind candidates and causes that I cared for and about.

When I leave the Senate in a few weeks, I will continue trying to be an educated citizen, an advocate, and an activist. Over the last 8½ years, as I have had the privilege of serving the people of Minnesota, I also gained a new perspective on the issues we face and the way we here in Washington make decisions.

Before I go, I want to spend some time sharing some of what I have learned in a series of speeches focusing on the challenges I came to Washington to address—challenges that my colleagues will continue to wrestle with, challenges that will determine not just the political landscape we leave for the next generation of Senators but what kind of country we leave for the next generation of Americans.

Today I want to start by talking about education. Even at a time when our politics is more polarized and more poisonous than it has ever been, you would think that education is one place where Democrats and Republicans could come together to make progress. After all, while we do have significant differences on the details of education policy, nobody disagrees about the importance of getting it right. We all agree that education from pre-K through college and beyond is es-

sential to providing our economy with a skilled workforce that is ready to innovate and lead us into the future.

Ever since I have been here, employers in Minnesota have stressed to me that they need employees with critical thinking and problem solving skills, with team work and creativity-tools that we need our children to be developing long before they enter the workforce. I am pretty sure that my colleagues hear this from employers in their States too.

Of course, education isn't just about our economy. It is about the most basic responsibility we have as human beings. Many of us who have served in the Senate have children and grandchildren, and we would do anything to be able to promise to them that when they grow up, they will be able to follow their dreams and take a risk on themselves to achieve more than we ever could. Many of us remember just how hard our own parents worked to keep that promise to us. All of us, Democrat and Republican alike, want to be able to make that promise not just to our own children but to every child in America, no matter where they grow up or what their family life is like or what obstacles they may encounter along the way.

We all want a country where every child has the opportunity to fulfill his or her God-given potential. We all understand that whether we can provide every child with a great education is the most basic measure of whether we are keeping that promise. Fortunately, the HELP Committee, which I had the honor of serving on since I first arrived in the Senate, has been led by public servants who share those values and a common commitment to delivering on that promise. Under Chairman Harkin and now under Chairman ALEXANDER and Ranking Member MURRAY, the HELP Committee has often been able to be an example of how Democrats and Republicans can work together to make progress.

When I first got here, the debate was focused on No Child Left Behind, which Congress had passed and President Bush had signed into law in 2002. Democrats and Republicans worked together on that bill back then because they all believed that it was important that our schools be held accountable for the results they achieved on behalf of all students. But by 2009, it had become clear that No Child Left Behind simply wasn't getting the job done.

A couple of weeks after I got to the Senate, I held a roundtable with principals at a school that had been turned around in a poor neighborhood by a great principal in St. Paul. One of the other principals told me that he referred to the NCLB tests as autopsies. I knew exactly what he meant. The kids were taking the tests in late April. The results didn't come back until late June or later—too late to let the results inform teachers' instruction of each child.

In Minnesota, therefore, most school districts added computer adaptive tests

in addition to the required NCLB tests—computers so the teachers could get the results right away and adaptive so that if a kid was getting all the questions right, the questions would get harder and if the kid was getting all of the questions wrong, the questions would get easier. That way, instead of measuring whether or not a student was appropriately proficient at grade level in reading and math, educators could find out exactly what grade level each student was at in those subjects—adaptive. NCLB, on the other hand, didn't allow a State to test outside of grade level. Schools and teachers were judged on whether a sufficient percentage of kids met this arbitrary standard. This became known as measuring for proficiency, and it created what teachers in Minnesota described to me as “a race to the middle.” It made them focus on kids just below or just above proficiency. So the ones just below would get above and the ones just above would stay above proficiency, and they would ignore the kid at the top because those kids at the top, no matter what you did, wouldn't go below proficiency. They would ignore the kids at the bottom because no matter what you did that year you couldn't get those kids to proficiency. So there was this race to the middle. Think about how perverse that is.

Think about a fifth grade teacher who takes a kid from a second grade level of reading to a fourth grade level of reading. Well, that kid didn't get to proficiency. So under No Child Left Behind, that teacher was a goat. But a teacher who helps a child grow by two grade levels in a single year is a hero. Teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members and parents all argued that it was time to stop measuring just for proficiency and to measure for growth or measure just growth, instead. This became quickly a central focus of the debate over how to reform No Child Left Behind, and it remains a pivotal debate when it comes to the future of our education system, which is why it was so shocking when President Trump picked a Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, who turned out to have no idea what the growth versus proficiency debate was even about.

It would be as if our children's future relied on the outcome of a football game and the President nominated a head coach who didn't know how many yards it took to get a first down. It was a deeply upsetting moment, not just because of what it revealed about Mrs. DeVos or the President who had picked her to be in charge of our Nation's education system but because these are the kinds of problems that we should be able to solve. There is nothing ideological about the debate. It is simply a matter of coming together and working in good faith to make things work better. A functioning democracy should be able to get stuff like this right, and sometimes we have.

For example, in the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act we were able to

address some of the excessive testing that was burdening educators and students alike. Under the new law, schools would still have to test every year between third and eighth grade and once in high school, but each State would control the consequences of the test results and that would almost certainly mean fewer high stakes tests, less drilling, more time to teach and learn.

Meanwhile, the law included important priorities like strengthening STEM education, expanding student mental health services, increasing access to courses that help high school students earn college credit, and preparing and recruiting more and better principals to lead better schools. These are all things that I fought to include in that final law.

It also included a long overdue investment in early childhood education, but not enough—not enough. We know from study after study that a quality early childhood education returns between \$7 and \$16 for every dollar invested. That is because children who get a quality early childhood education are less likely to be referred to special ed and less likely to be held back a grade. They have better health outcomes. Girls are less likely to get pregnant in adolescence. They are more likely to graduate high school, go to college, and get a good job and pay taxes. And they are less likely to go to prison.

If we really want to address future deficits, we would be pouring money into training early childhood educators. Instead, in his budget in the Congress, the Trump administration proposed major cuts to early childhood education. We could easily put more money into these programs if we weren't giving enormous tax cuts to the wealthy and to powerful corporations.

We also need to make sure that as our kids get older, they can rely on quality afterschool programs. Last spring, I visited Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis. During my tour of the school's afterschool program, I saw students rehearsing for a production of the “Addams Family.” I saw students getting critical academic support like tutoring and college prep. In fact, Roosevelt's successful afterschool programs contributed to their graduation rate going from less than 50 percent to over 70 percent in just 3 years. That is pretty incredible. That is why I fought to renew the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program in the reform of No Child Left Behind. It is a program that keeps schools open after school.

If we all agree that education should be a priority, we should be willing to put our money where our mouths are and fund these programs. I am proud that during the course of my time here, we have had a bipartisan commitment in doing just that. We made progress—not enough, but we made progress. Again, however, that progress was put at risk under this administration. That

afterschool program was zeroed out in its proposed budget. What is more, this administration seems to be outright hostile to the idea that we have responsibilities to provide children with a quality public education.

I am proud of the work we have done to support and improve our public schools, but the Department of Education is now led by a Secretary with a long history of actively undermining public education. Secretary DeVos and her family have spent millions and millions of dollars advocating for an ideology that would steal funds from public schools in order to fund private and religious education.

Now, let's take a moment to talk about what that means. Secretary DeVos ran a political action committee called All Children Matter, which spent millions in campaign contributions to promote the use of taxpayer dollars for school vouchers. The argument was that these vouchers would allow low-income students to leave the public school system and attend private schools of their family's choice. Secretary DeVos has been pushing to expand vouchers for years, even though research clearly shows that voucher programs don't work. In fact, the academic outcomes for students who use vouchers to attend private schools is abysmal.

A New York Times article from February of this year reported on three different studies of large State voucher programs in Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio. Each study found that vouchers negatively impact results in both reading and math. In fact, in Louisiana's voucher program, public elementary school students who started at the 50th percentile in math and then used a voucher to transfer to a private school dropped to the 26th percentile in a single year. Harvard education professor Martin West said this negative effect was “as large as any I've seen in the literature,” and he was talking about all literature, the entire history of American education research.

Secretary DeVos is a serious threat to our public school system and a threat to the quality of education in this country overall. I have pushed as hard as I can to protect our students from what this administration has been trying to do. I have sent the Secretary over a dozen letters this year on protecting students from harassment, helping defrauded students, and holding for-profit schools accountable. It is my hope that my colleagues will continue to be vigilant in overseeing the Department of Education and making sure our public education system is not dismantled.

Our public education system was designed to give all kids a real chance in life, but teachers and administrators often lack the resources they need to give the kids the opportunities they deserve. Every year, I push appropriators to increase funding for a number of critical education programs like early childhood, STEM, and professional development for teachers, and I hope my

colleagues will continue that fight to increase resources for these programs.

Improving our education system isn't just about funding and accountability. If we want to keep the promise of opportunity to every child, we have to recognize that some kids face obstacles others do not, and we have to do more to make sure they are not left behind. For example, particularly kids who grow up poor are far more likely to suffer what are called adverse childhood experiences, not just the stress of living in poverty itself but exposure to domestic violence, abuse or neglect, drug and alcohol abuse, the incarceration of a parent, the death of a sibling. All of those adverse childhood experiences affect brain chemistry and the ability to learn. If we want to improve education, we need to do a better job of helping these children overcome these traumas and a better job of addressing economic inequality so fewer have to deal with the trauma in the first place. This is another reason we need more high-quality, early childhood programs and more training for childcare providers so they can better support kids who have experienced trauma.

Here is another example, foster kids. It is not uncommon for foster children to have 10, 11, 12 sets of foster parents during their childhood. This wreaks havoc on their education. Sometimes foster kids fall through the cracks of our education system. If a child's new foster parents live in a different school district, the foster child is yanked out of school and sent to one in the new school district. Kayla VanDyke, who at the time was an incredibly impressive high school senior from Minnesota, testified before the HELP Committee that she had been in seven foster homes, and she did fall through the cracks. She missed fourth grade entirely. For foster kids, school is often the one constant in their life—maybe they have a teacher they really like or an extracurricular activity that means everything to them or maybe they have these things called friends. That is why I wrote a provision in the Every Student Succeeds Act to require school districts to work with child welfare agencies to make sure foster children who are changing homes are not forced to change schools. I would like to think that somewhere there is a foster child running cross-country or developing a passion for history because of a great teacher or doing homework with a good friend because of legislation I worked on, legislation that passed with a strong bipartisan majority.

Here is yet another example—kids in Indian Country. When I first came to the Senate, I asked for a seat on the Indian Affairs Committee. Serving on that committee, you are confronted with the tragic disparities from which Native people in our country suffer. One of them is the huge disparity in educational resources for Native kids compared to their peers. That inequity in education plays out in many ways,

but you can literally see it in the school buildings some Native kids are forced to learn in. Indian school buildings are often unsafe, harmful to the health of children and teachers, and ultimately a barrier to the education of the students.

So going back to early 2009, I had been fighting for funding to fix the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig High School on Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota. When I first visited the school, I saw exposed wiring, mold, roof leaks, rodents, uneven floors, poor lighting, and sewer problems. I learned the students had faced these horrendous conditions in their classrooms for years. It was deplorable and was a terrible place to learn, so I worked for the better part of a decade to rebuild that school. I sent my colleagues a series of powerful editorials about conditions at the school as written by the Minneapolis StarTribune. I raised this issue at what seems like countless Indian Affairs hearings. After a lot of work from the community, the Tribe, and the Obama administration, we were able to secure the funding to rebuild the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig school.

I am thrilled so many bright, young students in Leech Lake will be able to feel safe and comfortable in a brandnew school, which will be opening this coming March, but this is one school, one reservation, and there are hundreds of schools like the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig High School that are not suitable for learning, and we need to do so much more for our Native kids.

In Indian Country, we know that historical trauma has a huge impact on our children. We have seen the ripple effects of intergenerational trauma, and we know it can lead to other types of trauma experienced in childhood.

That is why, when we look at these adverse childhood experiences, particularly within the Native community, we can't dismiss their effects on kids' ability to learn. Kids in Indian Country are woefully underserved when it comes to housing and economic opportunity. A report by Wilder Research states that this can "threaten their educational success, health and mental health, and personal development." I am pleased Senator HEITKAMP of North Dakota has been focused on addressing this issue.

One more example: LGBT students deserve to learn in an environment free from discrimination, and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Far too often, LGBT kids endure harassment and discrimination. More than 30 percent of LGBT kids report missing a day of school in the previous month because they felt unsafe. You can't learn when you dread going to school, and when that happens, those students are deprived of an equal education.

In America, we have passed laws that guard against harassment in our schools on the basis of race, national origin, sex, and disability, but LGBT students continue to face bullying and intimidation without recourse. I have a bill called the Student Non-Discrimi-

nation Act that would merely provide LGBT students the same legal remedies available to other kids under our Federal civil rights laws. It says, schools would have to listen when a parent says "my child isn't safe," and the school has to do something about it. It would ensure that LGBT kids have the same protections as every other child. I worked very hard to get this provision into the final law, and I was greatly disappointed it wasn't included, even though it got 52 votes on the Senate floor.

It is our responsibility, not just as Senators but as adults, to protect children and help them flourish, and I sincerely hope every one of my colleagues will take up this fight and work to get this across the finish line.

The last thing I want to mention on the subject of education is this. For a long time, we thought about learning as something that started when you went to kindergarten and continued until you got your high school diploma and either went off to college or went off to work. We now know education is a lifelong pursuit, but we also know we need to do more to make it possible for it to continue long after 12th grade.

College used to be an affordable and accessible step into the middle class for so many Americans. I always think of my wife Franni and her family. You see, when Franni was 17 months old, her dad, a decorated World War II veteran, died in a car accident, leaving her mom widowed with five kids. Neil, her brother, went into the Coast Guard and became an electrical engineer, but all four girls went to college, and they went on combinations of Pell grants and scholarships. You see, back then, a Pell grant covered about 80 percent of the cost of a public college education. Today, it is less than 35 percent.

So today kids have to work while they go to college. That is not new, but when I have done roundtables at colleges across Minnesota, many of them tell me they are working full time, in addition to going to school full time, which seems like it might make it harder to focus on your studies or to stay awake. That is why I have been working to bring down the cost of college, increase financial aid to students, and make textbooks cheaper. We need to help millions of Americans refinance their student loan debt at lower interest rates, and we need to help low- and middle-income students go to college debt-free. This is something we could easily be doing if we weren't giving giant tax cuts to the superwealthy and to powerful corporations.

It is important to remember, too, that young people don't necessarily need to start at a 4-year college to become successful in life or to build a secure middle-class lifestyle. In many career and technical programs, students complete their education after they have been employed in good jobs because they had the credentials to get those jobs—good jobs with benefits that promise a secure career. Some of

those benefits are often that company paying for the rest of your education—finishing, maybe, your associate's degree or your bachelor's degree or graduate school.

We need to overcome the assumption that career and technical schools are a ceiling to future success. They are a ladder to careers with good wages and benefits that can support a comfortable lifestyle.

There is a high demand for these workers now. That is because we have what is called a skills gap in this country. Every Senator has it in their State. It is one of the things I hear about frequently when I travel around Minnesota, especially when I talk to businesses. I hear about job positions employers can't fill because they can't find qualified workers or workers with the right skills. At the same time, I hear from students who are anxious to start a career but lack specific technical skills.

To remain competitive in today's global economy, we need a better trained workforce. That is why I introduced the Community College to Career Fund Act. The grants would help create public-private partnerships that support Learn and Earn on-the-job training programs. Employers would develop a workforce with the specific skills they need to grow their businesses, and everybody wins.

Here is how it works. You go to get a credential. That credential gets you a job. Then the employer will pay for you to continue your education as you continue to work and make a living. I have seen this time and again, and it works.

We also need to reauthorize the Perkins Career and Technical Education law, which includes support for public-private partnership training programs in K-12.

I think some of the things we need to do to make college more affordable and accessible and valuable for students are pretty clear. But let's be honest. The Trump administration—after nearly a year in office—has been going in a very different direction and has been working against the best interests of college students. One of the most unfortunate aspects of this is that predatory for-profit colleges have been able to get even more of a foothold in our higher education system since Secretary DeVos took over.

The good news when it comes to education is that America still has teachers and principals and school board members and superintendents who work hard every day to take responsibility for every student under their care and deliver on the promise of a great education. We still have parents and neighbors and coaches who look out for our children's well-being and who work to equip them with the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

As anyone who has spent any time in a school lately can tell you, our kids themselves still have some pretty impressive potential. What is more, we

still have people on both sides of the aisle in the Senate who care passionately about education and are willing to do the hard work of bipartisan legislating in order to improve our schools and keep that promise of opportunity for the next generation.

If the last 8½ years have taught me that progress on education is possible, even in a divided Washington, this past year has taught me that further progress isn't inevitable and that the progress we have already made may not be safe.

It will be up to my colleagues not to address just the policy challenges posed by an education system that faces a big transition and a budget that forces hard choices but also the political challenges of the moment. It is my hope and prayer that they will be up to the task. Our children's future depends on it.

Thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

LIBYAN SLAVE TRADE

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I rise today to bring to this body's attention and to the attention of all Americans what can best be characterized as a modern-day slave trade. It is an outrage that is hard to fathom but that still exists today.

I was recently speaking to a group of pastors from my home State of Illinois who do wonderful work advocating on behalf of human rights and human dignity. One of them, Rev. Walter Johnson of the Greater Institutional Church in Chicago, shared his frustration that abuses and atrocities being inflicted upon migrants and refugees in Libya have received not nearly enough attention or outrage in the American public, government, or in the press. I couldn't agree more. That is why I have come to the Senate floor today to speak on this alarming human rights crisis.

Every American should be appalled by chilling images of modern-day slave auctions. Earlier this month in an investigative piece, CNN released video of an auction taking place. It was not an auction for a piece of art or another item one might bid on but an auction for human beings—human beings sold for the equivalent of \$400.

The reports were a wake-up call for the world about the gravity of this situation in North Africa as migrants fleeing danger and economic hardship face new horrors on their journey to seek a better future. The wars in the Middle East and instability in North Africa have upended huge swaths of the region, displacing thousands of vulnerable men, women, and children. Thou-

sands of people fleeing Africa and the Middle East make their way through Libya, hoping to cross the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, many of them face horrifying human rights abuses and danger along the way.

Because of Libya's limited capacity to govern, its restrictive policies against migrants, and its inability or refusal to accommodate the migrants, conditions are ripe for exploitation and abuse in their detention centers. Particularly horrifying have been reports from survivors about the exploitation at the hands of smugglers who are openly engaging in human slavery, preying on the most vulnerable, who have surrendered everything for a shot at the future. Migrants have been subjected to horrible human rights abuses in Libya over the past few years, including forced labor, torture, and sexual violence.

The administration must put this issue front and center when we engage with Libyan officials and demand accountability and progress. Sadly, it appears the administration missed such an opportunity to address this issue during Prime Minister Fayiz al-Sarraj's visit to Washington earlier this month.

The United Nations-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli, however, has taken an important step in acknowledging these abuses and is requesting international support. The European Union and African Union evacuation plan to repatriate the detained migrants that was agreed upon in the Ivory Coast is a move in the right direction.

In 2016, the United States provided emergency funding for the International Organization for Migration—the IOM—to help shut down migrant detentions centers in Libya. While the EU rightly picked up the majority of funding to repatriate migrants, the United States should once again consider another emergency infusion to the IOM to help accelerate the closure of these facilities in addition to the \$31 million in foreign operations funding for Libya that the administration requested this year.

Additionally, we have a former American Ambassador, William Lacy Swing, who is the Director General of the International Organization for Migration. He is on the frontlines of this fight and stands ready to work with Libyan authorities, the European Union, and African Union countries so that he can help address this crisis. The United States can play an important role in supporting Director General Swing and other international efforts to protect these migrants from exploitation and abuse.

Human rights are essential to the functioning and well-being of our global community, and that community is threatened when migrants fleeing persecution are forced into inhumane, exploitative conditions and slavery. Given this country's own dark history with slavery, we cannot afford to remain silent in the face of such suffering. We must stand together with