

consent I may be now recognized for 20 minutes.

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

The Senator from Kansas is recognized.

Mr. ROBERTS. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. ROBERTS and Mr. KERREY pertaining to the introduction of S. 529 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. AKAKA addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii is recognized for 5 minutes.

REDUCING CLASS SIZE

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I rise in support of an amendment to be offered by my colleagues from Washington and Massachusetts, Senators MURRAY and KENNEDY, to S. 280, the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999. The amendment represents a true investment in education, as well as in the future of our Nation and my State of Hawaii.

Built on a bipartisan agreement passed last year, the amendment seeks to reduce class size in early grades through the hiring of additional well-qualified teachers. This would mean more individualized attention for students from their teachers, increased learning in the basics that will immeasurably help them in future grades, and a better chance at success from an early age.

I also support other amendments to be offered to S. 280. One will be offered by my colleague, the senior Senator from New Jersey, Mr. LAUTENBERG, regarding an equally vital school modernization initiative. I have spoken in support of this initiative in the past. This plan would finance the building and renovation of public schools through tax credits in lieu of interest on bonds. Hawaii would receive tax credits to support \$50 million in school modernization.

The other amendment that will be offered by Senator BOXER to help communities fund afterschool programs for kindergarten, elementary, and secondary school students will be one that I will support. This will help keep students off the streets after school, for too many youths in my State are left with nothing to do but turn to drugs, alcohol, gangs and other destructive behaviors. And this happens also in other States. These amendments have my full support.

Now I would like to focus my remarks on the class size amendment. I commend my colleagues for supporting the first installment of the 7-year class size reduction proposal last year. We passed \$1.2 billion in 1998 to hire 30,000 teachers. Under this spending, Hawaii will receive more than \$5.6 million. We must pass the Murray-Kennedy amendment to finish the job and assure that the teachers hired under last year's downpayment will continue to be funded.

This amendment would provide \$1.4 billion in fiscal year 2000 to hire 38,000 teachers, which would give Hawaii nearly \$7 million for 178 teachers. So this is something that Hawaii really looks forward to.

Students in my State need these well-qualified, well-trained teachers. I hear from students, parents, and teachers alike that classes are too large. The average size of a class in Hawaii is in the mid-twenties. However, research shows that the optimum number of students in a class, particularly lower grades, is in the mid- to upper-teens.

Among other problems, larger classes create discipline problems, especially in communities with large numbers of at-risk children. If we want to give our students the best possible chance to learn, they need smaller classes and teachers who are able to give them enough personal attention.

In addition to helping students, this amendment would also help Hawaii's teachers. As a former teacher, I have taught both small and large classes. I have taught in different kinds of systems. I know when students are grasping ideas. And we know when they are not. One of the most rewarding things a teacher can experience is to see the faces of students light up when they realize they have learned something new. When there are too many students in a class and only one teacher to supervise them, the result is a difficult and poor learning environment.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me in voting for this class size amendment. It makes sense to focus our efforts this way on students during their early grades, because these represent some of the most vital years in a child's educational development. We must give our children a rock-solid foundation in the basics so they may continue to build a strong base of knowledge throughout their educational history. We know that well-educated children will mean a great citizenry for the future of our country.

I thank my colleagues, Senators MURRAY and KENNEDY, for giving me this opportunity and this chance to speak on their amendment at this most important time in the history of our country.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. ABRAHAM addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I am here today along with Senators SESSIONS and LEVIN to introduce a very important piece of legislation. I wonder if I could obtain unanimous consent so we might have the speaking in the order in which I would introduce the legislation. Then, after I finish speaking with respect to the legislation, Senator SESSIONS and then Senator LEVIN, in that order, would also

have the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator has 15 minutes.

(The remarks of Mr. ABRAHAM, Mr. SESSIONS, and Mr. LEVIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 531 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BAUCUS. 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 FLEXIBILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT OF 1999

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I want to state very simply but strongly and unequivocally that I support S. 280, the Education Flexibility Partnership Act, and I support it very strongly. There is a very simple truth. That is, we need to trust our parents, trust our teachers, trust our local school boards. We should do everything in our power to unshackle our children from binding Federal Government-mandated rules that might make sense in Manhattan, NY, but not in Manhattan, MT.

Two weeks ago I had the honor of addressing the Montana State legislature, and when I spoke I told them that the time has come to bring the promise of world-class education to every Montanan. I daresay that virtually everyone in this body has made the same statement, because he or she believes it very deeply, when speaking to his or her own legislatures back in their own States or to any group whatsoever that is interested in education. I believe very deeply we must do that.

I also believe we need to ingrain that ethic into the hearts and minds of those who care about education all across our country. Indeed, it is similar to the environment. We are the stewards of our children's learning, and our future as a nation very deeply depends on our willingness to invest in them and our teachers and our schools all across our country.

We have a moral responsibility to leave this Nation's children prepared to meet the challenges ahead. That challenge takes a unique form when we talk about meeting the standards of rural States. Nearly 40 percent of the children who go to school in America every day go to a rural school in a small town, yet somehow we as a nation invest only 22 percent of our total education funding in these students. Rural students are being shortchanged by a ratio of 2 to 1. I will work hard this year to see that every student in America, whether in urban America or in rural America, is provided for fairly and equally.

But money alone is not enough. The Federal Government must be a partner in education with parents, teachers, and local schools, not an obstacle. Ed-Flex is the right step to take for our children. All Ed-Flex does is say to States, if you come up with a better way to do your job, we will get out of your way and let you do it. Right now, a well-meaning but confusing and distant Federal bureaucracy too often stands in their way. Let me give some examples.

Say Federal funds allowed a small Montana school, or even a large New York City school, to purchase computers for students with disabilities. Those computers probably will not get used all day long, and it makes sense that these computers be utilized to help other students when disabled students do not need them. But Federal rules prevent other students from using those computers. Does that make sense? No. So, under Ed-Flex, States can get a waiver and use these computers to educate all our children.

Another example: If a school has over 50 percent of its students who are under the poverty line, they can mix all of their Federal funds together, pool them with State funds, and create programs that help every student in that school. But what about schools in the next bracket, with between one-third and one-half of their students under the poverty line? In those schools, money for disadvantaged children must be spent directly on those children, even if that same money can be used in ways that will better educate the disadvantaged children and every other student in that school.

The other day I talked to my very good friend, Nancy Keenan. Who is Nancy Keenan? She is the superintendent of public instruction for my State. There is no better friend to Montana schoolchildren than Nancy Keenan. She tells me that right now these schools beat their heads up against Federal rules, trying to untangle the redtape and convince folks over 2,000 miles away, back in Washington, DC, that their local plans make sense. It is very, very depressing. If this bill passes, Montana—all States—could get waivers so the schools could deal directly with the Nancys of the country, and their parents and teachers, to find a solution that works better for every child.

It is time to restore trust back to the people. Right now, 12 States have been granted the right by Congress to experiment with education flexibility. You will not hear one Senator from those States stand up with even one instance where education flexibility has not worked. In fact, every State agrees that it allowed local folks to form partnerships, to create plans that work to better educate their children. That is all we want. We want our parents, our teachers, and local school boards, all working together, to give our children the very best. The Federal Government must be a better partner. We ought to

do everything in our power to help our children. It is that simple.

I believe the bill before us, Ed-Flex, is the right way to take care of it and I applaud Senators WYDEN and FRIST for their efforts. I very much hope this passes quickly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I commend my colleague from Montana, Senator BAUCUS, for his work on education and his understanding that this is a key issue we need to address from the Federal level. Too often today we hear from people who say, "No, this is a local issue, this is just a State issue." Of course it is; it is absolutely a local issue; it is absolutely a State issue. But we have to do our part, too, whether it is passing the Ed-Flex bill so we can reduce some of the bureaucratic regulations or whether it is providing additional resources for those districts to shrink class size or working with teacher-training and technology. These are things we have to address, and I thank my colleague from Montana for his work on this.

Mr. President, I rise today to talk about an amendment I will be offering shortly on the Ed-Flex bill, which is going to be on the floor probably in the next several minutes. The amendment I offer is one that many of my colleagues have come to the floor to talk about and to support, because it is an issue that parents and teachers and community leaders and business leaders truly understand when it comes to the issue of education. That is the fact that too many of our classrooms are overcrowded; too many of our teachers are trying to teach to classes with 30 or 35 students. They are not giving students the individual attention they need in order for them to learn the skills that we need them to learn, whether it is reading or writing or math or science.

The Murray-Kennedy amendment which I will be offering will simply authorize a 6-year effort to help our school districts hire 100,000 new, well-trained teachers in grades 1 through 3. School districts will be able to use up to 15 percent of those funds for professional development activities so they can improve the quality of their teaching pool—something that all schools tell us they need. And, after meeting the target ratio of 1-to-18 in grades 1 through 3, school districts will be able to use the funds for professional development activities. This is an amendment, again, that parents and teachers and community leaders support. We have heard from law enforcement, we have heard from businesses, that we need to help address this from the national level.

When parents send their children to school next fall—next fall, 6 months from now—they are going to do what they do every fall when their child comes home from school on the first day. They are going to sit them down

and they are going to ask them: Who is your teacher and how many children are in your class? They ask those questions because they know the number of students in the child's classroom will make a difference in their child's ability to learn that year and they know who their teacher is. If it is the best qualified teacher, their child will have a successful year.

Next year, next fall when they ask that question, those schools that those children attend will have a new tool for helping students to learn. That is because of the budget bill we passed last year. Because of our actions, approximately 30,000 new, well-prepared teachers will go into classrooms across this country and we will be able to say we have made progress.

Last year, as all of you will remember, I came to the Senate Chamber many times to fight to pass my bill, S. 2209, which was the Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Act of 1998.

You will also recall that I finally got my language into the appropriations negotiations and then worked closely with the administration and with leaders here on Capitol Hill to get it passed, and it did pass, after a bipartisan discussion and in a bipartisan way. Last fall, last October, Republicans and Democrats alike touted their success at providing local school communities with much-needed help to improve learning for every child by reducing class size in grades 1 through 3.

The American people are watching this week as we talk about education. They fully expect this Congress to continue to support education efforts that really work, such as reducing class size and hiring quality teachers. They want to know whether what we did last October was just for a political moment or whether we really are committed to reducing class size so our children across this country will get the kind of education they need. We started the job last fall and now we need to finish it. We have to provide the schools the remainder of the funding necessary to hire 100,000 new and better prepared teachers over the next 6 years.

Our first and best opportunity for a bipartisan solution is this debate on S. 280, which is the Ed-Flex bill that we are going to be discussing shortly. This is a perfect opportunity for early positive success, and people are watching to see if we are going to work together on this critical issue this year. This week Americans are telling Congress they want to see passage of the Murray-Kennedy amendment to reduce class size and improve teacher quality.

Mr. President, my class size reduction proposal honors the bipartisan agreement we achieved last year. It requires no new forms and no redtape. It focuses on hiring new teachers, but it also makes investments in teacher quality from the outset. It allows districts that meet their goals of getting to 18 or fewer students in classes in grades 1 through 3, to be able to use that money to improve class size in

other grades, or to take steps to improve the quality of their teaching pool.

Class size reduction isn't some new national idea. Local students, parents, teachers, State and local policymakers have asked for this kind of national investment in class size reduction for years. My proposal emphasizes local flexibility in making improvements.

Mr. President, let me talk for a minute about the Ed-Flex bill. Both last year and this year I have been very supportive of the Education Flexibility Partnership Act. That is because I think to change thinking among local and State policymakers is a good thing. It frees them from some of the restrictions that may keep them and our public schools from becoming the best that they can be. But a change in thinking alone is not enough. Local schools need action. They need investment. They need resources in order to show measurable improvement for all children.

With class size reduction funds, we will have new, well-trained teachers so every child, every child in this country, grades 1 through 3, can get the attention they need and that they must have in order to improve the quality of their learning.

Once local educators have a plan for improving student achievement, we must make key investments at the national level to help them get the job done. This means funding class size reduction, teacher quality improvement, and school construction. It also means passing Ed-Flex, which we all want to do. Today is our best chance to pass both Ed-Flex and class size reduction and send a strong message to local educators that we have heard their concerns and we are responding. Congress does need to pass Ed-Flex, but, more importantly, it must pass the Murray-Kennedy amendment to reduce class size and improve teacher quality.

Mr. President, we have to continue to improve the effort that we began last year, right here, in a bipartisan effort to help local schools, local teachers, and local communities get the results they need. Schools across this Nation are fully engaged in this debate right now over quality in learning and in identifying what works to improve learning for students. Local education leaders know that class size reduction is effective. They know as they reduce class size they can also improve the quality of their local teaching pool by improving professional development, training certification and recruitment.

Local communities are using the Federal class size and teacher quality effort as a way to beef up their own investment in the future of young people. Governors and State legislators across this country are proposing class size investments this year based on our successful efforts of last year. They are watching to see whether or not we really mean that we are committed to class size reduction or it was just a political move from last year.

In Washington State, my home State, Governor Gary Locke and key State legislators are debating these investments right now in Olympia and watching what we are doing so there is an important reason right now to pass the class size amendment today. Local school districts, school boards across this country—and I was a former school board member so I know what they do in February and March; they put their budgets together for the following years—are looking to us to see if we are going to continue this investment so that they can begin to put their budgets together and hire the staffs they need to make a commitment to now, so when those first hires are made in July, they know that this just wasn't a one-time bill, but this bipartisan Senate and Congress, this administration meant what they said last fall when they said class size reduction is a national priority.

We cannot wait to pass this amendment. We need to do it now so that those school boards and those local communities know that we say what we mean and we follow up on it right here in Washington, DC.

I will be offering this amendment later. I hope to be talking again about it today. This is clearly an issue for which parents and communities are looking to us, to trust the Federal Government. Will they follow up on their word? Will they make an investment that actually makes a difference? As we go through this debate, I will show you, all of my colleagues, and the country, studies that show that class size reduction makes a difference in student learning. We have a responsibility as the Federal Government. We have to live up to our commitment and not just make promises about education but truly make investments that work.

I thank my colleagues for the time this morning. I look forward to their support in a bipartisan way for the class size amendment.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. AL-LARD). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. 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 FLEXIBILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT OF 1999

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 280, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: A bill (S. 280) to provide for education flexibility partnerships.

The Senate resumed consideration of the bill.

Pending:

Jeffords amendment No. 31, in the nature of a substitute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. BINGAMAN, is recognized to offer an amendment.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I thank you very much.

AMENDMENT NO. 35

(Purpose: To provide for school dropout prevention, and for other purposes)

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk on behalf of myself, Senator REID, Senator BRYAN and Senator LEVIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New Mexico [Mr. BINGAMAN], for himself, Mr. REID, Mr. LEVIN and Mr. BRYAN, proposes an amendment numbered 35.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted".)

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I am proposing the National Dropout Prevention Act as an amendment to this Ed-Flex legislation. As I indicated, the cosponsors of this amendment are Senators REID, LEVIN and BRYAN.

In my view, the amendment would create a much-needed program to target those schools in our country that have the highest dropout rates in the Nation. There is at present very little help from the Federal level going to some of these most troubled high schools, and the amendment is a valuable necessary addition to this legislation to begin moving ahead in solving this problem.

Improving our schools, as we are trying to do through the Ed-Flex bill and through many other initiatives in Congress, is not going to make a whole lot of difference if half or a third—some substantial portion—of our students have already left before they graduate and they are no longer in those schools to receive the benefits of that assistance. Efforts to provide better teachers, more flexibility, computers in the classroom, higher standards—all of those efforts—will be diluted if we continue to ignore the dropout crisis we have in this country.

We do have what I refer to as a dropout drain. This chart makes the point very graphically showing that—the bucket represents our school system—we have students coming out of the school system in very large numbers and not gaining the benefit of the education we are trying to provide.

At too many schools, dropout rates reach 30 percent and even 50 percent, according to a 1998 Education Week report. Most States do not publish cumulative data, but Florida recently found that its 4-year dropout rate approached 50 percent when they added the students who dropped out in the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior year. They got close to 50 percent in the State of Florida.