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## **BILL GATES TESTIFIES BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE: Microsoft Chairman Pushes for High School Reform, Says Every Child Should Graduate from High School Prepared for College, Career, and Life**

In his testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) on March 7, **Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates** shared his thoughts on the future of American education, the development of the nation's workforce, and the policies necessary to ensure America's continued competitiveness in the global economy. During the hearing on "Strengthening American Competitiveness for the 21st Century," Gates called for improved immigration policies for highly skilled workers and greater investment in scientific research, but he spent the majority of his time urging improvements to the nation's education system—specifically high schools.

"America's greatest educational shortcoming today is what for much of our history was its greatest pride: our public schools," Gates said. "American schools have long been the cornerstone of this country's fundamental belief that all people have equal value and deserve an equal opportunity to lead productive lives. Yet all of the evidence indicates that our high schools are no longer a path to opportunity and success, but a barrier to both. ... Every student in America should graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life. Every child. No exceptions."

In his opening statement, **HELP Committee Chairman Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)** agreed that every student needed a "world-class education" in order for the country to remain globally competitive. He also thanked Gates for his work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve the nation's high schools. "In large part to your work, we know how critical it is for our high schools to prepare students for success in college and the workplace," he said. "We know that we can improve the results for our children by creating schools that serve all students with rigorous standards, challenging curriculums, up-to-date materials and technology, highly trained teachers, and supportive communities."

Kennedy added that more work needed to be done. Specifically, he mentioned the need for better math and science instruction, good teachers for all students—especially those in high-poverty and high-minority schools—and increased access to college.

Gates agreed that America could not afford to rest on its laurels, but instead needed to make new investments to carry the country into the future. "Too often, we as a society are sacrificing the long-term good of our country in the interests of short-term gain," he said. "Too often, we lack the political will to take the steps necessary to ensure that America remains a technology and innovation leader." He added that the nation could no longer live off of past investments and

## **Bill Gates Testifies Before Senate Committee** (Continued from p. 1)

instead needed to invest equal energy and resources to ensure that America's future is "as bright and prosperous as its present."

In his opening statement, **Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), the ranking member on the HELP Committee**, painted a dismal picture of what could happen if the status quo remains unchanged. "Every day in the United States, 7,000 students drop out of school," he said. "Unless high schools are able to graduate their students at higher rates than the 68 to 70 percent they currently do, more than 12 million students will drop out during the course of the next decade. The result long term will be a loss to the nation of \$3 trillion, and as you can imagine, even more in terms of the quality of life for those dropouts."

Among Gates's specific suggestions for improving the nation's education system, he said that reversing "dismal" high school graduation rates had to be a "top priority." He proposed a target of doubling the number of young people who graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life. He also called on Congress to provide incentives for states to meet the goals of the National Governors Association's Graduation Rate Compact, a compact originally signed by all fifty of the nation's governors pledging to adopt accurate and consistent measurements for high school graduation.

In order to transform the American high school for the twenty-first century, Gates called for an equal focus on standards, measurements and data, and additional support for students and teachers. Noting that only about half of the states require students to take three or four years of math to graduate and that eight states do not set any math course requirements, Gates called on Congress to create incentives that would encourage states to adopt higher standards. He also pushed for incentives that would encourage students to pursue careers in math and science and called on Congress to focus more energy on upgrading the skills of Americans already in the workforce.

Among his other recommendations, Gates called for the creation of a Center for State Education Data, which would serve as a repository of state education data for policymakers and researchers and that could be used implement change, such as personalizing learning, to make it more relevant and engaging for students. He also praised the Teacher Incentive Fund, a relatively new program that rewards teachers and principals for raising student achievement and taking positions in high-need schools.

Gates concluded his testimony on high school reform by saying that the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, which is scheduled for this year, would provide Congress with the opportunity to address some of the solutions he mentioned. He acknowledged that enacting reforms would not be easy and would require a great deal of political will. However, he stressed that the benefit that the country could reap from making these changes would pay "rich dividends for our nation's next generation. . . . We have had the amazing good fortune to live through one of the most prosperous and innovative periods in history," he said. "We must not squander this opportunity to secure America's continued competitiveness and prosperity."

Complete video of the hearing, as well as the text of Gates's testimony, is available at [http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2007\\_03\\_07/2007\\_03\\_07.html](http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2007_03_07/2007_03_07.html).



## **SECRETARY SPELLINGS DEFENDS FY 2008 EDUCATION BUDGET: Secretary Receives Criticism for Lack of Funding**

In separate appearances before the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education last week, **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings** faced pointed criticism from members of Congress for what they perceived was an insufficient budget for the U.S. Department of Education.

During the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on March 12, **Chairman David Obey (D-WI)**, who also serves as chairman of the full House Appropriations Committee, did not pull punches in articulating his displeasure with President Bush's Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 education budget. "I want to make it clear," he said. "This budget for education is going to be increased significantly."

Chairman Obey was not the only member of the subcommittee to voice displeasure with President Bush's FY 2008 education budget, which would fund discretionary education programs about \$1.5 billion below the current level of \$57.5 billion. Specifically, subcommittee members from both parties questioned Secretary Spellings about the budget's proposed cuts to, or same-level funding for, a variety of education programs, including GEAR UP, TRIO, 21st Century Learning Centers, and Dropout Prevention.

In response to these questions, Spellings typically provided one of two explanations. She either said that small programs were cut in order to fund larger programs, such as Title I, that give states greater flexibility in deciding how to spend the money, or that the administration was trying to reduce the federal budget deficit and was forced to make difficult choices. During one of these exchanges, **Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH)** expressed frustration with the Secretary's federal budget deficit argument and pointed out that there was an upcoming vote on hundreds of millions of more dollars to be spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **Senate Subcommittee Hearing Focuses on Funding for NCLB**

While the hearing before the House subcommittee was about the president's overall education budget for FY 2008, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education's hearing on March 14 examined proposed funding for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Once again, Secretary Spellings faced tough questions about what the senators described as inadequate funding for NCLB programs.

"Year after year, the President sends us a budget that comes nowhere close to funding No Child Left Behind at an adequate level," said **Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)**. "The numbers have gotten almost laughable. The president's FY08 budget underfunds NCLB by \$14.8 billion, for a cumulative shortfall of \$70.9 billion since enactment of the law. Funding for Title I alone—the cornerstone of the law—would be shortchanged by \$11.1 billion, for a cumulative shortfall of \$54.7 billion."

## Secretary Spellings Defends FY 2008 Education Budget

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**Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), the subcommittee's ranking member**, shared Harkin's sentiments, calling the president's education budget "very problematic (sic)" and "unrealistic." He told Secretary Spellings that she was in a special position to be an advocate for these programs because she has worked with the president for such a long time. He added, "The next time you see President Bush, give him a piece of my mind."

Echoing her responses in the House subcommittee hearing, Spellings pointed to the tough budget environment and said that the president's budget made some tough choices and favored funding "what works" and "higher-priority programs" over programs that have achieved their original purpose or were duplicative. "This combination of terminations and reductions would make available approximately \$3.3 billion for the administration's priorities," she said.

For instance, Secretary Spellings said that reauthorizing NCLB was the "top priority" for 2008. She also talked about the consensus that was emerging over the need to address high school reform. "There is a broad consensus on the importance of education for America's future in our increasingly competitive global economy . . . and a strong commitment to ensuring that all students not only graduate from high school, but graduate with real skills that they can put to use either at college or in the workforce," she said. "I have been pleased to see a lot of common ground in the early discussions, reports, and recommendations on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, including the need to focus more attention on the high school level. . . ."

Senator Harkin did give the president credit for his \$500 million proposal to turn around schools in need of improvement and for the \$1.1 billion increase for Title I. However, he noted that the money for both of those increases would come from eliminating other education programs that are "of high priority to Congress." Harkin also gave warning that overall funding for NCLB would have to be on the table when discussions begin on reauthorization for the law.

"Accountability is important; I'm all for accountability. But raising student achievement takes more than testing. It also takes money. It takes money to hire good teachers, update the curricula, develop high-quality assessments, and make all the other improvements that schools need to leave no child behind. And I assure you: Before I vote to reauthorize No Child Left Behind, I will insist that it's adequately funded."

A webcast of the House subcommittee hearing is available at <http://www.c-span.org/rss/video.asp?MediaID=30080>.

A webcast of the Senate subcommittee hearing is available at [http://appropriations.senate.gov/Media/2007\\_03\\_14\\_Webcast\\_of\\_the\\_March\\_14\\_Hearing\\_on\\_Funding\\_for\\_No\\_Child\\_Left\\_Behind.ram](http://appropriations.senate.gov/Media/2007_03_14_Webcast_of_the_March_14_Hearing_on_Funding_for_No_Child_Left_Behind.ram).

Secretary Spellings's testimony is available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/latest/index.html?src=ln>.

## Senate Begins Consideration of Education Budget

The U.S. Department of Education would receive an increase of \$6 billion over the president's request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 under the congressional budget resolution that was reported out of the Senate Budget Committee on March 15. In total, the budget resolution, which was developed by **Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND)**, would provide a \$16 billion–\$18 billion increase in domestic appropriations over President Bush's allocation for FY 2008. In addition to the increase for education, the budget resolution includes substantial additional funding for veterans, children's health insurance, and community policing programs.

"This plan would not increase taxes," said Conrad. "It provides resources for our priorities—children's health, schools, and our veterans—that otherwise would have been cut under the administration's plan." Conrad added that his plan would balance the budget by 2012.

Republicans disagreed with Conrad's assessment and noted that the Democratic budget proposal assumes a \$400 billion revenue jump over five years without really saying from where the money would materialize. "It's almost like Wizard of Oz tax policy here," said **Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH)**, the **committee's ranking member**. "There's somebody behind the curtain, and we can't see who it is, but he's going to come up with the money to pay for this."

Although it is a nonbinding spending blueprint that is not signed by the president, the congressional budget resolution sets limits on the spending and tax legislation that Congress will consider for the rest of the year. Only the total amount of discretionary spending in the final budget resolution is binding on the appropriations committees, but last week's efforts are a good sign that education programs could see significant increases this year.

The full Senate is expected to take up the budget resolution during the week of March 19. The House Budget Committee is also expected to begin debate on its version of the congressional budget resolution this week.



## **NO COMMITTEE LEFT BEHIND: House and Senate Education Committees Hold Joint Hearing on NCLB Reauthorization**

In a rare joint hearing of House and Senate education committees last week, a bipartisan collection of Senators and Representatives made it clear that they would like to move forward with the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as soon as possible. Lawmakers also reiterated their belief in NCLB's overall goal of getting every child to proficiency in reading and math by 2014.

"While it is critical that we remain faithful to the goals of No Child Left Behind, it is equally important that—five years after its enactment—we seek out new and better ideas for how best to achieve those goals," said **Representative George Miller, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee**. "This hearing is the formal beginning of what will be a bipartisan, comprehensive, and inclusive process to change and improve the No Child Left Behind law. We will hear a broad range of opinions on which provisions of the law are working well and which are not in our schools and for our children."

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) addressed what he saw as problem areas during his opening statement. "We need more effective ways to measure student growth toward standards, and to recognize schools for that progress," he said. "Our goal is to focus on the lowest performing schools, instead of simply classifying so many as failures." He added that labeling schools as being in need of improvement was not enough—they also need help to improve.

## **No Committee Left Behind** (Continued from p. 5)

Specifically, Kennedy mentioned the need to strengthen the teacher workforce while encouraging more qualified teachers to work in high-poverty and high-minority schools. He also said that Congress needs to help states develop high standards that are aligned to rigorous curricula, so that students who graduate from school are ready to compete in the workforce or to do well in college.

He also raised the issue of additional funding. “Most of all, we must use this reauthorization to give schools the resources they need to implement these essential reforms. If we shortchange our schools, we’re shortchanging America,” he said.

Witnesses at the hearing were **former Georgia Governor Roy E. Barnes, co-chairman, Aspen Institute Commission on NCLB; Wade Henderson, president and CEO, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Arthur Rothkopf, vice president, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Michael Casserly, executive director, Council of Great City Schools; Edward McElroy, president, American Federation of Teachers; Reg Weaver, president, National Education Association; and Elizabeth Burmaster, president, Council of Chief State School Officers.**

During the question-and-answer portion of the hearing, Senator Kennedy asked panelists what could be done to address the high numbers of high school dropouts. Reflecting the need to treat education as a continuum, Governor Barnes suggested that Congress consider some specific initiatives in middle schools, whereas Mr. McElroy preferred that Congress focus more intently on the early grades.

Complete audio and video of the hearing are available at <http://boss.streamos.com/wmedia/edwork/fc/fc031307.wvx>.



### **STATE OF THE STATES COVERAGE CONTINUES: Alabama Governor Promotes Pay-for-Performance Plan for Teachers, Texas Governor Defends Similar Program**

The Teacher Incentive Fund (referenced in first article in this edition) is a federal program that rewards teachers and principals for raising student achievement. A similar idea has been considered in several of the states, including in Alabama, where **Governor Bob Riley (R)** proposed bonuses for teachers who improve student performance, and by **Texas Governor Rick Perry (R)**, in whose state a pay-for-performance program is scheduled to begin this fall.

#### **Alabama: Riley Focuses on Adolescent Literacy, Rigorous Courses, and Teacher Quality**

In his March 6 state of the state address, **Alabama Governor Bob Riley (R)** proudly noted that Alabama’s existing plans to improve education were ranked eighth nationwide by the recent Education Week *Quality Counts* study, and he pledged to continue moving forward on a bipartisan basis.

Riley’s budget proposal includes a \$390 million increase in education funding, a significant portion of which is dedicated to the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) and the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). The ARI provides training and ongoing professional

development by expert literacy coaches to help teachers improve reading; the AMSTI follows a similar training model and also provides schools with equipment, supplies and materials, and on-site math and science specialists.

Noting that AMSTI schools have outperformed others on every single standardized test, Riley announced a plan to include 614 schools in the initiative by the end of 2008. The ARI, which currently serves all students in grades K–3 and has trained 28,000 teachers, would be expanded to cover all grade levels and fully include 910 schools overall.

However, Riley also pointed out that many of the state’s teachers hadn’t received the encouragement and support that they need. He announced plans to pair all first- and second-year teachers with trained mentors, and to grant all teachers a 7 percent pay raise. Riley also proposed a pilot program to provide performance bonuses for effective teachers.

Governor Riley’s complete speech is available at <http://www.governorpress.state.al.us/pr/sp-2007-03-06-sos-2007.asp>.

### **Texas: Perry Calls Education, Teachers Key to Overcoming Poverty**

**Texas Governor Rick Perry (R)** used his February 6 state of the state address to focus on the need to extend economic prosperity to the nearly four million Texans who “live in prosperity’s shadow rather than its light.” Perry emphasized the critical role of education in reaching that goal.

“For the children of disadvantaged families, there is one singular hope for removing them from a cycle of poverty and despair, and that is a quality education,” he said.

Perry stated that teachers are of critical importance in Texas due to “unique factors,” such as a population of over 600,000 English language learners and many students coming from families that lack a high school diploma. He praised the state’s recent \$2,000 pay raise for every teacher and vowed to defend the pay-for-performance program that will go into effect this fall. Perry also said that the state must do more to equip teachers to succeed and expressed support for more professional development, a “renewed focus” on best practices, and for the removal of chronically under-performing teachers from classrooms.

The governor also highlighted the state’s groundbreaking work in high school reform, such as implementing a college-preparatory curriculum and tailoring individualized graduation plans to at-risk students but noted that many achievement gaps remained. He focused on rectifying those gaps through earlier intervention, proposing an additional \$80 million to expand the state’s “Early Start” pre-K program.

Governor Perry’s complete speech is available at [http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/speeches/speech\\_020607](http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/speeches/speech_020607).

***Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress*** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC, and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s secondary school students to achieve high standards.



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