

That was more than a year ago, and yet Amir's family still has little clue as to his fate. Amir has been held for much of his captivity in solitary confinement. He has not been granted access to his Iranian attorney and has been allowed only limited contact with family. Switzerland, which oversees U.S. interests in Iran, has not been granted consular access to him.

There is no evidence that Amir was engaged in any espionage activity while visiting his family in Iran. There is every reason to believe—including the ruling of the Iranian Supreme Court—that the information used against Amir in his original trial was deeply flawed. A videotaped “confession” broadcast on Iranian television was obviously edited. Iranian officials have yet to make clear what charges, if any, Amir faces, or when he might be re-tried on those charges, even though more than a year has passed since his original sentence was overturned. Humanitarian and human rights groups including Amnesty International have called for Amir's release. So have a number of U.S.-based Islamic organizations, including Islamic Circle of North America, Islamic Society of North America, Muslim Public Affairs, Council, Council on American-Islamic Relations of Michigan, the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, Islamic House of Wisdom, the Muslim Center of Detroit and the Michigan Muslim Community Council.

Recently, Amir's family has received some limited communication with him. He has been able to send them letters, and an uncle in Iran has been given permission to visit Amir in prison. This limited contact has been welcome, but has only increased the family's desire to secure Amir's return. This desire is all the stronger because Amir's father, a college professor in Flint, has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Ali Hekmati faces his illness wondering if he will ever again be able to see his son. Islamic and universal principles of compassion and mercy argue for his release.

Our two nations have wide differences of opinion, many of them longstanding, others which have emerged more recently. But innocent citizens of both our nations should not be caught up in matters of state. I urge the Iranian government to recognize the humanitarian necessity of releasing Amir Hekmati and returning him to the Michigan family that has missed him for so long.

#### THE FARM BILL

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I wish to speak to my amendment No. 1079 to the farm bill. This amendment—with Republican and Democratic support—would simply increase the authorization for the Local and Regional Procurement Program from \$40 million per year to \$60 million per year.

It would increase the flexibility for aid providers to use locally and region-

ally purchased food, which is an important element of U.S. food assistance. There is no score because we are simply increasing the authorization for this discretionary program.

The Local and Regional Procurement Program is based on a pilot program authorized in the 2008 farm bill to test projects that could help get food aid to hungry populations faster and more efficiently by sourcing food in the communities and regions closest to those in need.

USDA and Cornell University have studied the pilot program and found it has been able to provide aid quickly and efficiently while also supporting development of food markets in low-income countries. This amendment would simply increase the authorized funding level so we can invest additional resources in this successful program.

My amendment is supported by 20 groups, including American Jewish World Service, Bread for the World, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, InterAction, Lutheran World Relief, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office, Mercy Corps, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network—MFAN—ONE, Oxfam America, Partners in Health, Save the Children, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, United Methodist Church-General Board of Church and Society, and World Food Program USA.

I wish to thank the cosponsors of this amendment—Republicans and Democrats—for supporting this effort, including Senators JOHANNES, DURBIN, ISAKSON, and LEAHY.

#### NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND REFORM

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to speak briefly about two pieces of legislation that I have introduced. They are the Educational Accountability and State Flexibility Act and the Early Intervention for Graduation Success Act. I intend to speak with my colleagues about these bills in the coming days and weeks, but I would like to take a moment now to provide an overview of my thoughts.

We have all heard from our constituents—teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and parents—about the No Child Left Behind Act. Clearly, the law has some good things. Americans deserve accountability for how their Federal tax dollars are spent, even when they are spent in their local schools. Parents want to know their local schools can help prepare their children for the future. But No Child Left Behind went too far. My bill, the Educational Accountability and State Flexibility Act, seeks to maintain reasonable accountability to taxpayers and parents while providing greater flexibility to States

and schools to meet our children's needs and local communities' individual circumstances.

As we know, the Senate HELP Committee has again begun to address the need to reform No Child Left Behind. A markup of the Strengthening America's Schools Act began yesterday, Tuesday, June 11, 2013. I am hopeful the committee can come together to reduce, not expand, the Federal government's role in our local schools. I know several of my colleagues share that hope, including Senator ALEXANDER, who offered a substitute amendment to reduce the Federal mandates in the Strengthening America's Schools Act. I voted for that amendment and others like it. Since the Alexander amendment and several similar amendments failed, I hope my colleagues will review my Educational Accountability and School Flexibility Act. It is intended to offer some ideas for continuing the conversation.

My bill would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—also known as No Child Left Behind—to do the following: No. 1: Eliminate adequate yearly progress—AYP; No. 2: Allow States to stick with an approved waiver plan if that is their choice; No. 3: Require States, not the Federal government, to determine each school's level of success in helping kids succeed based on broad, flexible parameters, publish the results, reward what schools are doing right, and help the schools that need help; No. 4: Require States to diagnose why a school is not improving to help fix what is wrong in a way that will work for that school and community—not implement a school turnaround model mandated by the Federal government; No. 6: Prohibit the Secretary from prioritizing or mandating any school turnaround strategy; No. 7: Prohibit the Secretary of Education from approving or disapproving a State's decisions about standards, tests, and accountability while making sure the public can access experts' opinions on the plans; No. 8: Eliminate the Federal “highly qualified teacher” requirements and let States decide what makes teachers highly effective; No. 9: Continue to ask the low-performing schools to tutor students who are not succeeding in schools; No. 10: Continue to allow public school choice as long as a higher performing public school is available and kids would not have to ride long hours on dangerous roads to get there; and No. 11: Respect the voice and expertise of our Nation's indigenous first peoples regarding what helps Native children succeed in school.

I have also reintroduced my Early Intervention for Graduation Success Act with a few changes from last Congress. I hope my colleagues will take some time to review this legislation.

This legislation would, if enacted, amend the current school dropout prevention provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It would focus attention on identifying and

helping students who are at risk to not graduate from high school as early as prekindergarten and through elementary and middle school.

Some may ask, Why are you concentrating on toddlers and elementary school children when you are trying to solve the high school dropout crisis facing our Nation? Why not focus attention and our Nation's scarce resources on high school students, or even middle school students?

The reason is simple. Early on is when children's troubles in school begin, and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. High school and middle school students do not just wake up one day and say, I think I will drop out of school today. Twenty-five years of research tells us that dropping out is a long process of frustration, alienation, and even boredom—it is not a sudden decision. We know that students with disabilities, minority and poor children, and students whose home lives are, in all sorts of ways, difficult have lower graduation rates than their peers. The challenges children face today are all too prevalent, and we know the factors that make it harder for them to succeed in school. We know this.

It only makes sense, then, that we rework the program intended to help schools increase their graduation rates so that it actually helps schools help children when we can make the most difference. We need to act before these children have fought for years just to stay afloat, and before they are too tired, frustrated, alienated, and angry to fight anymore.

But I have also heard from some who asked that my legislation include a stronger focus on secondary schools, knowing that today we have middle and high schools that are struggling to keep their students in school and on a path to success. So I have done that.

I have also heard from my State. They shared concerns with me that the cost to create a database combining data from multiple State agencies that have information that will inform schools as to students' risk factors for dropping out—participation in public assistance programs, being homeless or a foster child, having an incarcerated parent, etc.—would be too high. So, knowing that it still makes sense to help our educators better identify students who are at risk, I have amended my bill to just ask the State to help schools access this information while following FERPA and HIPAA rules for privacy of that data.

We all want our schools to be successful. We all want our children to be successful. I am hopeful my colleagues will take a good look at both of these bills, and that they will help to move the conversation forward about how we can help reach our goals.

#### TRIBUTE TO BRIGADIER GENERAL STEVEN R. RUDDER

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, today I rise to honor a true patriot and

native son of Canton, CT. After more than 3 years of service as the legislative assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Brig. Gen. Steven R. Rudder is deservedly moving up to assume the responsibilities of commanding general, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. On this occasion, I wish to recognize General Rudder's noble service and dedication to fostering the warm relationship between the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Senate.

Commissioned in June of 1984, General Rudder is well-known and respected as a true leader and warrior. In addition to serving as a weapons and tactics instructor, he has distinguished himself in combat and effectively commanded HML/A-167 and Marine Air Group 26.

Over the last 3 years, General Rudder has been instrumental in facilitating the oversight responsibilities of the Senate. Known for his comprehensive knowledge of legislative issues and the operational requirements of the Marine Corps, he ensured that the Senate Armed Services Committee was armed with timely information on Operation Enduring Freedom and other forward-deployed Marine forces, as well as numerous Marine Corps programs to include the Joint Strike Fighter, the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, and the MV-22 *Osprey*. Moreover, General Rudder worked to recognize the contributions of the Montford Point Marines—the first African Americans who entered into service with the Marine Corps during World War II—with a Congressional Gold Medal.

In 2011 I had the unique privilege of being the guest of honor at the U.S. Marine Corps Sunset Parade, hosted by General Rudder. It was a glorious display of military precision and a truly enjoyable and moving event. I join many past and present members of Congress in my gratitude and appreciation for General Rudder's outstanding leadership. I invite my Senate colleagues to wish him well, along with his wife Holly, as he transfers to Okinawa, Japan.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### ALASKA AIR NATIONAL GUARD

• Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have the honor today to recognize five great Americans who valiantly risked their lives multiple times in the service of their country. CPT Christopher Keen, MSgt. Sergeant Chad Moore, TSgt. Christopher Harding, SSgt. William Cenna, and SSgt. Sergeant Nickolas Watson are members of the Air National Guard from the State of Alaska who serve with the 212th Rescue Squadron from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. I'd like to tell you about some of the heroic actions taken by these men in the summer of 2012, when they were deployed to Afghanistan.

Captain Keen, Master Sergeant Moore, Tech Sergeant Harding, Staff

Sergeant Cenna, and Staff Sergeant Watson are assigned to an Air National Guard unit that specializes in dangerous medical evacuation missions. Pararescue Jumpers, or PJs, train to be inserted into the most hazardous and precarious situations to save lives. They learn to operate in the extreme cold and harsh terrain. As a matter of fact, Staff Sergeant Cenna was part of a five-member team to summit Denali about a month ago on May 9, 2013. PJs train on some of the most cutting edge equipment and master complicated medical procedures. If that is not enough, they prepare to do this job in the face of an enemy that, when they are plunged into the heart of a battle, can appear from any direction.

In order to fully understand the valorous actions of these five men in 2012, I must begin the story in April 2011. Staff Sergeant Cenna, who you will hear about again, was part of a rescue team tasked to recover two U.S. Army pilots downed in the Tagab Valley, Afghanistan. After dropping Sergeant Cenna and his teammate at the crash site, members of the aircrew were injured by enemy fire and forced to leave the team without overhead coverage. On the ground, insurgents began voicing their intent to take individuals hostage and Sergeant Cenna began taking enemy fire. A six-hour firefight ensued, and Sergeant Cenna maintained complete situational awareness while relaying critical information to attack helicopters above. Risking his life repeatedly, Sergeant Cenna's actions directly contributed to eliminating the threat and most importantly, enabled the recovery of the downed American pilot, a killed in action infantryman, and another critically wounded soldier from enemy territory. For his gallantry and devotion to duty on April 23, 2011, Staff Sergeant Cenna was awarded the Silver Star.

Just over a year later, on July 29, 2012, Staff Sergeant Cenna was again deployed to Afghanistan. He, along with Tech Sergeant Harding and Staff Sergeant Watson, were conducting a mission to evacuate two Danish soldiers near Gereshk, Afghanistan. The Danes had been critically wounded and were pinned down in an active firefight. The three-man pararescue team infiltrated at an unplanned insertion point approximately 100 meters from the soldiers. Without hesitation, the PJs maneuvered through a field with possible improvised explosive devices and enemy machine gun fire. The team then forded a flowing canal and climbed a 12-foot embankment to reach the wounded Danish soldiers. After applying lifesaving medical interventions and evacuating them to the transport vehicle, the team was notified of two more critically wounded soldiers at the incident site. Exposing themselves to extreme danger again, the team extracted those wounded troopers as well. In all that day, Tech Sergeant Harding, Staff Sergeant Cenna, and Staff Sergeant Watson saved four lives. Just a