

who I recently met with. On the economic front, Georgia's new currency, the lari, has remained stable since its introduction in 1995. The International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Department of State have praised Georgia's economic initiatives and their significant progress in developing a free-market economy. Several U.S. corporations have already established a presence in Georgia, spurring jobs and economic growth in both nations.

Mr. President, I encourage everyone to note this historic day, and congratulate Georgia on its extraordinary progress toward democracy and free-market principles.●

RAISING ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND LOWERING COLLEGE COSTS AT WEST MESA HIGH SCHOOL, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

● Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise to honor the achievements of the students and educators at West Mesa High School in Albuquerque, NM, and especially its growing Advanced Placement [AP] program.

On Tuesday, April 1, I had the opportunity to visit West Mesa and speak with students and teachers participating in the school's AP program. Several State legislators and business leaders joined me in a short but invaluable group discussion and class visit.

Perhaps most impressive was the visit to one of Mr. Tomas Fernandez' AP English classes, where students explained in their own words why AP courses are so important. In this class, the students don't ask for less home work or "dumbed-down" classes; they are demanding more challenging classes and higher academic expectations for all students. While AP classes are new to many, and set a very high standard, the students had found that they could succeed.

Principal Milton Baca and a growing number of West Mesa teachers are responding to this demand by providing more and more challenging classes in the school's growing AP program. For example, West Mesa recently added an AP Calculus course in addition to its AP English course, and five teachers attended AP teacher training institutes last summer. More teachers are planning to attend AP training courses this summer so they can start an AP science course in the next school year. I applaud all of these efforts.

For college-bound students, taking AP courses and passing AP exams can translate into valuable college credits for advanced high school work. For those AP students who decide not to go to college, they and their prospective employers can be confident that they are better prepared academically and will have an advantage as they compete for jobs and enter the work force.

Because AP programs are so beneficial to both work- and college-bound students, I have been working on efforts to expand these programs, as part of the solution to our State's clear

need for immediate, measurable education reform. To show the importance of strong academic skills to employers, I am working with several businesses in New Mexico to develop employment incentives for students who take and pass AP exams, especially in the core academic areas of English, math, and science. In addition, I am gratified that the State legislature increased funding for the AP New Mexico program to \$200,000 next year, as I requested in testimony before the relevant committees.

Despite this important progress, West Mesa High School and New Mexico have a long way to go to more fully utilize the AP program as a way to challenge high school students, raise academic achievement to higher levels, and improve our long-term economic productivity. In New Mexico, roughly 5,000 students took AP classes in 1996—up 22 percent from 2 years ago—with a 20-percent increase in AP tests taken, but this is still below the national average. New Mexico's per-capita participation rate remains 20 percent lower than Arizona's and 40 percent below the national average.

We are facing an uphill struggle to improve our schools and students' academic performance in several areas, including making better use of the AP program. But the strides that West Mesa High School is making are compelling evidence that we can make real and lasting positive change in our schools. I congratulate West Mesa's students and teachers on their accomplishments so far, wish them well on further advancement, and offer my assistance as they continue to improve.●

UNIVERSAL SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION

● Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I have read the report in the Wall Street Journal that Federal Communications Commission Chairman Reed E. Hundt proposes to implement only a portion of the new universal service fund rules by the statutory deadline of May 8. Specifically, he suggests delaying the adoption of rules assuring reasonable rates for telephone subscribers in rural and high-cost areas, although he would proceed to implement a new \$3 billion yearly fund to wire schools, libraries, and health care facilities through an unspecified tax on telephone company revenues.

Last January I wrote to Chairman Hundt about his apparent desire to implement these provisions prior to implementing the remainder of the universal service provisions of the statute. At that time, I stated that sound implementation of the Telecommunications Act requires that the Commission resolve all the related issues involved in universal service carefully and contemporaneously.

Apparently Chairman Hundt has not changed his view, Mr. President, but neither have I.

Implementing universal service funding in separate stages would be incom-

patible with the law. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 states clearly and unambiguously that the FCC "shall initiate a single proceeding to implement the recommendations from the Joint Board . . . and shall complete such proceeding" by May 8, 1997.

It would be consistent with this unequivocal statutory requirement for the FCC to adopt specific new rules on May 8 and have them take effect in the future. It would also be consistent with the statute for the FCC to adopt general outlines of new rules on May 8, and fill in specific details by subsequent order. The FCC can, and in my judgment should, avail itself of these courses of action if it finds, for whatever reason, that it cannot adopt final rules on all aspects of universal service on May 8. But one thing the FCC cannot do by law is pick and choose some statutory requirements to put into effect on May 8, and delay the rest till later.

Let me be clear. I can understand the possible problem Chairman Hundt faces: too much proposed subsidy, and not enough revenue to handle it without raising rates for telephone service. I emphatically am not suggesting that he simply proceed to adopt final universal service fund rules and thereby raise telephone rates on May 8. But if, after studying universal service as extensively as it has, the FCC has concluded that it cannot implement the universal service provisions of the statute without increasing telephone rates or incurring similar unacceptable outcomes, it must defer from implementing any universal service rules until it can satisfactorily demonstrate to both the Congress and the public that any rate increases that would result are inevitable in fact and appropriate in amount.

Unless and until the FCC can do that, the Commission should take no final action on universal service. To try and evade the issue by implementing the parts of universal service that may be politically desirable while dodging the rest because it appears politically unpalatable would be a dereliction of the Commission's duty under law.●

HONORING LARA GREEN SPECTOR

● Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise to honor Lara Green Spector, the Tobacco-Free Kids East Regional Youth Advocate of the Year. Lara is a ninth grader from Montclair High School in New Jersey who truly exemplifies the old adage that one person can make a difference.

Lara was the motivating force behind Montclair's recently passed ordinance banning cigarette vending machines and self-service displays. Who knows how many Montclair teenagers and children may not take up smoking because cigarettes are now more difficult to obtain. And local public officials, school advisers and residents all agree that this ordinance would never have