

effort once again demonstrates that when we focus on what really matters to America's families and work together, we can accomplish a great deal of good. And today, we are taking a substantial step in improving the teaching of reading in our schools.

There are few skills that are more important than literacy. It is what makes us good workers, good parents, and good citizens. Imagine not being able to read. Bus schedules, children's homework assignments, and local newspapers—all beyond your grasp. From start to finish, each day would be nearly impossible.

Yet, too many of our children leave school lacking this basic skill which is essential to their livelihood and their quality of life. But, for the child who cannot read, the problem begins much earlier than graduation. Research has shown that children who fall behind as early as the second and third grade do not catch up or become fluent readers unless expensive, intensive help is available to them. If such help is not available, these children become increasingly frustrated and are at substantial risk of dropping out of school altogether.

Our goal must be to help all children to read well, to read independently, and, importantly, to enjoy reading. We have a tremendous advantage today in reaching this goal in that we know so much more about the physiological process of learning to read. We also know what works and what does not. This bill makes sure that this new base of knowledge gets out beyond academia and its scholarly journals and into classrooms across the country where it can make a real difference in the lives of our children.

Beyond the classroom, this legislation will also help empower the first and most important teacher of all children—their parents. Children's literacy levels are directly related to the literacy ability and interest of their parents, especially their mothers. The values, attitudes and expectations held by parents and other care givers with respect to literacy will have a lasting effect on a child's attitude about learning to read. This bill will encourage parents to read to their children at an early age and foster the budding literacy skills of their children.

I am particularly pleased the bill also reaches out to Head Start and other local pre-school programs to bring them into these efforts to ensure that young children have the necessary foundation for literacy. In addition, the bill does not overlook the important contribution trained volunteers and mentors can have in improving a child's reading fluency and comprehension. This bill encourages local communities to tap into these efforts and coordinate volunteers to bring their talents and time into the schools to read with children one on one.

Finally, Mr. President, this bill does not overlook the most basic tool in any literacy effort—Books. Good, engaging,

age-appropriate books are critical to any successful effort to improve literacy. In too many homes, books are a rarity. And yet any parent will tell you how books capture the imagination and attention of toddlers and, even babies, better than any television show.

I think we need to do much more when it comes to books. Our tax laws have set up very perverse incentives that make it more profitable to destroy unsold books rather than donate them to schools or literacy organizations. I am hopeful that, when the Senate next revisits tax law, we can take a look at this issue and reverse these incentives to get more books into the hands of children. In the meantime, this legislation is a good first step in ensuring that children will have increased exposure and involvement with high-quality books.

Mr. President, this is a good thoughtful bill and I am very pleased that we will complete action on it this year and begin this important effort to improve our children's literacy skills.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Amendment be agreed to, the committee amendment, as amended, be agreed to, the bill be considered as read the third time and passed, as amended, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be placed in the appropriate place in the RECORD.

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

The amendment (No. 3740) was agreed to.

The committee amendment, as amended, was agreed to.

The bill (H.R. 2614), as amended, was considered read the third time, and passed.

Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, today the Senate passed H.R. 2614, the Reading Excellence Act, and I rise in celebration for the many Americans this important legislation will help. Reading is critical to every aspect of life, especially as we move into the high-tech world of the 21st century. With the passage of this bill, more Americans will secure the basic reading skills necessary to enjoy the benefits of citizenship. It will enable many to do some of the things we take for granted—being able to read a phone book, a dinner menu, directions on a medicine bottle, or a job application.

Right now, only 4 out of 10 of our Nation's third graders can read at grade level or above. This clearly can not stand. Our goal is to ensure that every child is able to read by the third grade. This bill is a down payment toward that goal. The Reading Excellence Act focuses on scientifically based methods for teaching reading, it provides for tutorial assistance for at-risk children, and addresses adult illiteracy so that parents can be their children's first and most important teacher. This bill stresses the basics, a return to proven teaching methods, and most importantly a return to methods that work.

It is unacceptable that only 10 percent of our teachers have received formal instruction on how to teach reading. Reading Excellence will give our educators the resources needed to prepare our children to read before they advance to the next grade.

With the leadership of Chairman WILLIAM F. GOODLING, H.R. 2614 passed the House last year. Earlier this year Reading Excellence was included in our Senate Republican blueprint for education reform. I also offered Reading Excellence, S. 1596, as a freestanding bill in the Senate on February 2, 1998. Again, in an effort to pass this legislation, I offered it as an amendment to my education savings accounts bill and it was agreed to unanimously. Unfortunately, the President killed that comprehensive education reform bill, vetoing the literacy language along with it. The administration has endorsed this language as a freestanding bill.

Helping kids read should not be a partisan issue. Both Chambers have now passed Reading Excellence unanimously, and I urge the President to sign H.R. 2614 into law. I praise Chairman GOODLING for his perseverance and dedication to helping over 3 million children at risk of falling behind. Senator COATS has also been a leader in getting this legislation to its final passage and we all thank him for his dedication to education. Today we take a first step, and as the poet Robert Frost says, "we have miles to go before we sleep."

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent James Fenwood, a fellow on my staff, be granted the privilege of the floor this morning.

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

Mr. GORTON addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The distinguished Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent I may proceed for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

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

THE SOCIAL SECURITY SURPLUS MUST BE PROTECTED

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, this year began in a way unprecedented during my years as a U.S. Senator. Just months after passing the balanced budget agreement of 1997, budget forecasters released projections that included the possibility of a budget surplus as early as 1999. By March, the Congressional Budget Office estimated an \$8 billion surplus by the end of fiscal year 1998.

I'll skip ahead a few months, because we all know that the surplus projections continued to grow. Last week, fiscal year 1998 came to an end with the President and Congress announcing a \$70 billion budget surplus.