

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be authorized to meet in executive session during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, January 27, 1999, at 9:30 a.m.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

PROTECTING OUR UNDERGROUND INFRASTRUCTURE

• Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, the last Congress enacted legislation which protects our nation's vital underground infrastructure. Power cables, telephone lines, water mains and pipelines affect our daily lives, and it is essential that they are given the best protection possible. This legislation, based on S.1115, the Comprehensive One-Call Notification Act, does just that. It provides incentives for states to improve their notification systems—systems which provide for accurate marking of underground facilities, and systems which prevent damage during excavation. This bill became law as part of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, TEA 21.

I am pleased to report that the response to the one-call legislation has been extremely positive. The truly bipartisan spirit that characterized Congress' approach to the legislation has been carried over into the cooperative spirit of the participants in implementing the bill.

The bill's first mandate convened a study on the best practices in one-call notification. This study will be submitted to Congress in June of this year, and is being carried out by the Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) of the Department of Transportation. I have received reports that OPS has fully involved those affected by the law in all phases of the design and implementation of the best practices. This has proven to be an excellent model for conducting a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors. Mr. President, I am particularly pleased by the leadership the excavation community has shown in working with one-call center representatives, underground facility operators and others interested in underground infrastructure protection by moving this study process forward.

This study is a bottom-up effort with emphasis on letting those with hands-on experience play leading roles. After a public meeting last August to bring together interested parties, the participants formed nine teams covering various aspects of underground infrastructure protection: one-call center practices, excavation, mapping, locating and marketing, compliance, planning and design, reporting and evaluation, public education, and emerging technologies. The teams are currently gathering information, receiving and

discussing any and all comments, and will produce the first drafts of the chapters for the final report. Team meetings are completely open to interested members of the public. Infact, schedules and minutes are being published on the OPS web page, <http://ops.dot.gov>, under "damage prevention."

Mr. President, the affected parties have checked their differences at the door, have worked together with openness and goodwill, have solved a very important infrastructure problem, and, because there was real world input, it will improve practices in the real world.

Looking ahead, the second phase of the bill calls for the Secretary of Transportation to offer grants to states which encourage improvements in their states' one-call notification systems. I expect the best practices study to significantly help devise criteria for awarding these grants. I hope the President's budget proposal funds these grant activities from general revenues in full recognition of the broad public benefit that accrues from effective underground infrastructure protection.

Mr. President, the process moving forward within the Department of Transportation has enlightened federalism through a government-industry partnership. I congratulate the monitoring the additional steps in the inclusive process to implement the protection of our vital underground infrastructure.●

TRIBUTE TO FAIRCHILD AFB KC- 135 CREW

• Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on January 13th, a Fairchild based KC-135 crashed near Geilenkirchen Air Base in Germany. Today, Team Fairchild and its many supporters gathered at the Spokane Opera House to grieve and to honor the memories of four members of the Washington Air National Guard who perished aboard the KC-135 in the service to our country.

I have had the pleasure of traveling to Fairchild Air Force Base on numerous occasions and meeting with the fine men and women there. They provide an indispensable part of our nation's defense and serve with pride and professionalism. I know that this tragedy hits especially hard on that close-knit community, and so it is with a heavy heart that I join them in their grief.

The four who died in the crash were members of the Washington Air National Guard 141st Air Refueling Wing, based at Fairchild Air Force Base near Spokane, Washington. Members of the 141st Air Refueling Wing were in Germany for training purposes and were participating in a routine NATO flight to refuel surveillance planes. The fallen men were all from Washington state, all family men, and all heroes.

Major David W. Fite, the pilot of the KC-135, was a resident of Bellevue,

Washington. He began his service in the Washington Air National Guard in 1991. He is survived by his wife, a brother and his parents.

Captain Kenneth F. Thiele, co-pilot, was a resident of Spokane, Washington and served in the Washington Air National Guard since September 1998. He is survived by his wife.

Major Matthew F. Laiho, navigator, was a resident of Spokane, Washington and served in the Washington Air National Guard since 1989. He is survived by his wife, two children and his parents.

Technical Sergeant Richard D. Visintainer, boom operator, was also a resident of Spokane, Washington. His service in the Washington Air National Guard began in 1972. He is survived by his former wife and children.

Colonel James Wynne, the Wing Commander, was quoted, "The guard is such a close-knit extended family that this will certainly send a wave of grief throughout the unit. This is a tragic loss." Colonel Wynne is right. Fairchild grieves today, its spirit challenged by tragedy. I know Team Fairchild will serve as a comfort to grieving families and fellow Air Force personnel.

My thoughts and prayers are with the families of Major Fite, Captain Thiele, Major Laiho and Sergeant Visintainer. Each will be missed. Each will be remembered.●

EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AND EXCELLENCE ACT OF 1999

• Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, yesterday, I introduced the Educational Opportunities and Excellence Act of 1999. This legislation represents the Republican vision how we can improve educational opportunities for every American child.

Last year, Congressional Republicans passed an educational agenda to provide every child in America with first-class learning opportunities in safe, secure schools, to give parents new choices and more decision-making power over their children's education, and to bring common-sense reforms to a myriad of redundant and antiquated federal education programs. Unfortunately, the special interests in Washington were resistant to change and fought desperately against our reform efforts. This is what happened:

WHAT WE PROPOSED AND WHAT HAPPENED

- (1) A+ Accounts—President vetoed.
- (2) Block Grants—Passed Senate, dropped in conference.
- (3) Charter Schools—Signed into law.
- (4) School Choice Pilot Program—President vetoed.
- (5) Teacher Testing/Merit Pay—President vetoed.
- (6) Reading Excellence—Signed into law.
- (7) Teacher and Student Safety—President vetoed.
- (8) Full Funding of IDEA—Increased Funding by over \$500m.

Despite the fierce opposition of our opponents, we will continue our fight to bring the best education possible within the reach of every American