

My amendment builds on the bipartisan success of last year's agreement. It is based on local control and flexibility, and it focuses on improving teacher quality, which is so important. Local school districts will make all the decisions about hiring and training their new teachers. Any school district that has already reduced class size in those early grades to 18 or fewer students will be able to use the funds to either further reduce class size in the early grades or to reduce class size in other grades or carry out activities to help improve teacher quality.

My amendment will also provide accountability and ensure that schools communicate with parents which is so essential today. These funds are supplementary, and they cannot replace current spending on teachers or teachers' salaries. School districts will be required to send a report card in easily understood language to their local community including information about how achievement has improved as a result of reducing class size, and they won't have to fill out any new forms. Reducing red tape and improving local decisionmaking in education programs is a bipartisan effort, and both Ed-Flex and my class size reduction amendment accomplish both.

Last year's bipartisan agreement that we reached included my legislation to provide \$1.2 billion as a downpayment on the goal of hiring 100,000 new teachers, and it did it without requiring any new reports or any new forms. Governors and legislators across this country are now responding to our budget agreement last year and addressing this at their local levels. Local school districts are putting together their budgets right now as we speak and teachers are writing their lesson plans for next year with the expectation that we will deliver on the promise that we made to them last year. They are all counting on us. We must take this opportunity to now fulfill our commitment to reduce class size.

Mr. President, smaller classes mean a better education for children. Studies have shown it. Teachers know it. Parents know it. And they know it from experience. I have seen it with my own eyes. Controlling a room of 30 children is not teaching. It's crowd control. We need to return to teaching.

Just yesterday, I heard from Christi Rennebohn-Franz, who is a first and second grade teacher in Pullman, WA, and she wrote and told me that "without small class sizes, we cannot reach all children and give them the time that they deserve. If you have too many students in your class, you go home every day knowing that you came up short giving them the attention they need."

Another teacher from Fircrest, WA, wrote to me to say that "since I teach at an at-risk school, lower class size means that I can more effectively work with students on a variety of problems they bring to my classroom every day."

Mr. President, I am looking forward to working with Senators from both sides of the aisle to ensure that we meet our promise to these teachers and all the other parents and students across America to reduce class size and truly make a difference in the education of our children and our country's future.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

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#### EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I checked with the Republican cloakroom. I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended a half an hour.

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

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#### EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, as the Senator from Nevada said earlier, many of us have theories on education as parents who watched our kids go through school and met with teachers and administrators. The Senator from Washington has spent enough time in classrooms to teach all of us, and I think her suggestions are very valuable suggestions.

What I have found as I have traveled around my state, and I think other Senators have as well, is that the basics of what they need in education and a helping hand can make such a difference.

When we talked about after school programs in school district after school district, they said, Senator, can you help us with transporting the kids safely from a school to an after school program and back home again?

A practical concern that stops them from doing things that are so important. And I think there are ways we can help here. Yesterday, we passed an important bill about military salaries. We decided to put \$11 billion more in the bill than the President's budget requested, and many of us raised questions about where that figure came from, why there had been no hearings on it. And they said, of course, we want to help the military. We all do. But it really raises the question, if we were to come up with \$11- or \$12-billion today for education for after-school programs, I am afraid there would be a firestorm of opposition. People would say, wait a minute, you didn't have a hearing; it's too much of an undertaking by the Federal Government. I really hope that we can get this priority right.

People across America identify education as the No. 1 concern. I think it's because of their personal experience and also the realization that opportunity in this country comes with achievement, achievement in school is really I guess the best way to get started on a good life in America and many other places.

I am happy today to join with the Senator from Washington to discuss

this. Isn't it interesting, President Clinton's suggested 100,000 more teachers to reduce classroom size. My Republican Governor in Illinois, in the State of the State message, George Ryan, suggested 10,000 new teachers for our State. The reaction from local school districts? "Where are we going to put them? We need classrooms. You can't just give us more teachers and expect smaller classroom sizes without new classrooms."

That is why the President's proposal to help school districts modernize their schools, expand their schools, build new schools is really a timely suggestion. The GAO report a few years ago said that we need 6,000 new schools in America by the year 2006. One-third of all schools in America, serving 14 million kids, need extensive repair and replacement. So I think we understand that the President's proposal for teachers and classrooms is the only sensible way to have class room size reduction in a way that will be handled effectively.

Mrs. MURRAY. Will the Senator from Illinois yield on that point.

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, the Senator from Illinois brought up an extremely important point, and that is that hiring new teachers is one part, hiring well trained teachers is the second part, and providing classrooms for them clearly is a critical part. That is one of the reasons why in my amendment we make sure that it is very flexible language, so that local school districts that do have a school construction, a very real school construction crunch can use those dollars in a very flexible way so the teachers can work jointly in classrooms, that it isn't just one teacher per classroom, that we can do some local ways of providing extra one-on-one help with youngsters who need it the most.

We also must address the school construction problem. It is a real challenge to crumbling schools that exist across our country where our kids are in unsafe classrooms, where they are crowded simply because there is no space to put them. It is an area we have to address, and I am delighted the Senator from Illinois recognizes that.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator from Washington. I have noted this on the Senate floor before, but it struck me that at the turn of the last century one of the most amazing things that happened in America was that between the years 1890 and 1920 we built in America on average one new high school every day. We started our new century with a dedication to public education. We Democratized education unlike any country in the world. And we said, whether you are rich or poor, you are going to have a chance to go to high school.

That wasn't a Federal mandate. That sprung up from local communities that said, if we are going to build a community in Washington or Illinois, and it is going to be a real community, we are