On Senator McConnell’s staff, I would like to thank Sharon Soderstrom, Don Stewart, Jen Kuskowski, Katelyn Conner, Erica Suares, John Aebig, Neil Chatterjee, and Johnathan Burks.

On Senator Cornyn’s staff, I would like to thank Laura Dove, Robert Duncan, Chris Tuck, Mary Elizabeth Taylor, Megan Mercer, Tony Hanagan, Mike Smith, and Chloe Barz.

On Senator Tester’s staff, I would like to thank Monica, Emily, Kirlin, and John Chasup.

From the Republican Policy Committee, I would like to thank Dana Barbieri.

Finally, I would like to thank some in the education community for their persistent help with this bill, including Mary Kusler with the National Education Association, Tor Cowan with the American Federation of Teachers, Chris Minnich, Peter Zamora Carissa Moffat Miller, and Jessah Walker with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Stephen Parker and David Quam with the National Governors Association, and Noelle Ellerson and Sasha Pudelski with the School Superintendents Association.

Mr. President, as I said earlier—and I am speaking mainly to my colleagues on the Republican side now—Senator Murray’s preference for a large early childhood program is not in the bill. My preference for a large program to give parents more choices of schools is not in the bill. We are not voting on that today.

Today we are voting on one of two things: the status quo or the change. You are either voting yes to repeal the common core mandate or no to keep it.

You are either voting yes to get rid of the waivers through which the U.S. Department of Education has been operating as a national school board for 80,000 schools in 42 States or a vote no is same as I like the national school board. Your voting yes means the largest step toward local control of schools in 25 years or no means you are voting against the largest step toward local control in 25 years. A vote yes means you like the fact that this bill should produce less testing; no means you like the testing the way it is. Those are the choices. We are past the time when each of us has a chance to offer an amendment. We all offered our amendments. I have offered mine. Some of mine got 45 votes, and I needed 60 votes, so they are not in the bill, but the choice today is a chance to unleash a flood of excellence in student achievement across this country the way it should be—State by State, community by community, classroom by classroom.

I urge my colleagues to vote yes.

I yield back any time we have remaining.

I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on the adoption of the conference report.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. Cornyn. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. Cruz) and the Senator from Florida (Mr. Rubio).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Florida (Mr. Rubio) would have voted “nay.”

Mr. Durbin. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. Sanders) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Sullivan). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 334 Leg.]

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, today the U.S. Senate, by a vote of 85 to 12, has sent a Christmas present to 50 million children across this country. First, it has to go down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, where we hope President Obama will wrap a big bow around it, sign it, and send it to the children and the 3.4 million teachers who are looking forward to it.

This is a bill that is so important that the Nation’s Governors gave it their first full endorsement of any piece of legislation in 20 years. It has the full support of the Chief State School Officers, it has the full support of the school administrators, and it has the support of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

This is very good policy, and the reason it is, is it is bipartisan, it is a consensus, and instead of arguing about it after the President signs it—which I hope he will—classroom teachers, school board members, Governors, community by community, State by State can go to work implementing it, and making their plans to make their own decisions about what kind of tests to give, how many to give, what the standards should be, how to fix failing schools, how to reward outstanding teachers. We have created an environment that I believe will unleash a flood of excellence in student achievement, State by State and community by community.

I thank the Members of the Senate. I especially thank the members of the Health Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee who have worked so well together—all 22 of them. I especially thank Senator Patty Murray of Washington for her leadership and her effectiveness in helping to get such a remarkable event.

To take an issue this complex and difficult and have a vote of 85 to 12 proves that when the Senate puts its mind to it, it can do some very good work. We have done that today.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. Alexander. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess today from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS BILL

Mrs. Murray. Mr. President, let me echo the words of our chairman and thank him, our staff and everyone who has worked on this and everyone who has supported this in a bipartisan way to send it now to the President to be signed into law.

It is a great step forward. As the chairman, Senator Alexander, just said, the work must now begin in our schools, in our communities, and in our
States to find ways to make sure all of our students achieve. We have put them on that, we expect them to live up to that, and that is the promise of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1774

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am going to ask for a unanimous consent request but speak for a couple of minutes, engaging in some discussion with my dear friend, the senior Senator from the State of Utah.

First, I thank him for coming to the floor today on this issue. I am heartened that he has expressed interest in working with us to get something done to help our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico. I also thank my friends, the Senators from Connecticut, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, Illinois, and my colleague from New York who is here for their steadfast support for helping Puerto Rico in this time of crisis.

I rise today by happy economic, financial, and health care situation in Puerto Rico. The island is facing a financial crisis, a health care system on life support, and the situation grows worse each month.

Puerto Rico is $73 billion in debt already and large bond payments will continue to become due next month and in the months to come. Sadly, as Puerto Rico’s economy and health care system has floundered, residents have started to flee their homeland. As the economic situation worsens, the population shift from the island to the mainland will continue until the only ones left are those who don’t have the resources to move. At that point we are going to have a humanitarian crisis on our hands. If there isn’t one already.

There are 3.5 million people, Puerto Ricans, living on the island today and another 5.2 million living in the United States, including over 1 million in my State of New York. We have a basic American responsibility to aid all American citizens in times of crisis, no matter where they live. Beyond that basic imperative, if we fail to offer Puerto Rico assistance now, the problem will not be contained to the island. We are concerned with these issues, not only because Puerto Ricans are part of the American family and deserve the quality of life we all expect but also because our failure to act now could result in a Puerto Rican financial crisis that becomes a drag on our entire economy. I want to underscore this point. Congress must intervene before the crisis deepens and widens. We have the tools to fix this problem. They are sitting in the toolbox. The problem is Puerto Rico isn’t allowed to use them.

Similar to chapter 9 protections offered under the Bankruptcy Code, every State in the United States can access chapter 9 protections for municipal and public corporate debt, but Puerto Rico, because it is a territory, cannot. Providing Puerto Rico the ability to restructure its debt is absolutely necessary if Puerto Rico is going to get out from under its financial crisis.

Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have introduced legislation along with many of my other colleagues who will join us today that will put Puerto Rico on an equal footing when it comes to chapter 9. At the very least we should pass it right away and consider proposals as well. We could widen bankruptcy protections. There are health and economic issues as well and we have to look at those.

I stress to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that giving Puerto Rico the restructuring authority in our bill isn’t a bailout and will not require any additional spending. It will not cost the taxpayers one plug nickel, but it will do a whole lot of good to our friends in Puerto Rico.

On the health care front, I have introduced a bill with many of my same colleagues to address several aspects of the health care crisis, issues such as Medicaid funding and fairness, appropriate reimbursement rates, and equitable physician payments. Disparities in how the Medicare and Medicaid Programs treat Puerto Rico and our other territories are significant and need to be addressed.

In conclusion, I am going to be the first to admit that neither of these bills is a silver bullet to solve all of Puerto Rico’s problems, nor are they the only potential solutions. We are more than willing to work with the chairman of the Finance Committee, a good friend who I know cares about the Puerto Rican issue, to find other solutions and craft bipartisan legislation so long as it provides help to Puerto Rico, but the clock is ticking. We are running out of time. Congress must act now to address these issues that are stifling Puerto Rico’s economy and way of life. We must give them the tools they need to solve these problems.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1774 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1774 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I yield to the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, just briefly. I thank my colleague from Utah for his remarks. I want to work with him, as I know Senator Wyden, Senator GILLIBRAND, Senator MENENDEZ, and so many others on the floor want to get this done. We have to work together quickly and I appreciate him acknowledging that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I want to express my strong disappointment that we are unable to do this legislation now. There is a grave sense of urgency for the people living in Puerto Rico, so I share the goals of my colleagues to get this done sooner than later. This has to be moved forward. No American parent or child should have to face economic hardship because of where they live. Congress has the responsibility to actually help these families. The economic situation in Puerto Rico