

In summary, I believe VA services for SCI are already second to none, but we continue to seek opportunities to improve. Currently, VA cares for veterans with spinal cord dysfunction in 23 SCI centers, 29 SCI support clinics, and 120 primary care teams at non-SCI center facilities. With respect to capacity, from fiscal year (FY) 1996 to FY 1997, VA treated 4% more SCI patients and applied 3% more dollars to SCI care, although the number of beds and staff were decreased. A notable improvement in timeliness from FY 1996 to FY 1997 also was achieved for SCI patients. For acute care, meeting the "timeliness for admission" standard (one day) improved from 41% to 91%, and for routine care meeting the "timeliness of appointments" standard improved from 87% to 100%. It is my intent that the new program enhancements will build upon these measures, resulting in improved clinical outcomes and enhanced quality of care.

Again, thank you for sharing your commitment to VA's services for special veteran populations—a commitment with which I fully concur. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to meet or further discuss these matters.

Sincerely,

KENNETH W. KIZER.

A PLAN TO EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN

• Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, countless hours will be spent in this country, and even on this Senate floor, debating the issues that today fill the front pages of our newspapers. Some of the talk titillates, some of it disgusts—and Mr. President, it's clear that some of it requires the very serious attention of this Senate.

But the tribulations of public life in America today do not provide us sufficient excuses for inaction when it comes to addressing the crises in this country that don't make the front pages, but should. And there can be no excuses for any of us—or for anyone in this country—for our failure to do something to help the 50 million children in our public schools today—children whose reading scores show that of 2.6 million graduating high school students, one-third are below basic reading level, one-third are at basic, only one-third are proficient and only 100,000 are at a world class reading level; children who edge out only South Africa and Cyprus on international tests in science and math, with 29 percent of all college freshmen requiring remedial classes in basic skills.

Mr. President, we know that public education is in trouble—so much trouble that some argue it could implode from the weight and pressure of bloated bureaucracy, stagnant administration and inadequate classroom resources.

These statistics speak not just of a crisis—they speak of our collective failure to come together and do what it takes to give every child in this country a real chance at success. We are stuck both nationally and locally—unable or unwilling to answer the challenge, trapped in a debate that is little more than an echo of old and irrelevant positions with promising solutions sty-

mied by ideology and interest groups—both on the right and on the left.

Nowhere more than in the venerable United States Senate, where we pride ourselves on our ability to work together across partisan lines, we have been stuck in a place where Democrats and Republicans seem to talk past each other. Democrats are perceived to be always ready to throw money at the problem but never for sufficient accountability or creativity; Republicans are perceived as always ready to give a voucher to go somewhere else but rarely supportive of investing sufficient resources to make the public schools work. It's the reason why we spent weeks debating a bill this past spring—the major elementary and secondary education legislation of this 105th Congress—that would put \$7 into the pocket of the average public school student in this country—and we called that reform.

No wonder parents are losing faith in our ability to reform public education. No wonder they're looking elsewhere: in too many of our debates, whichever side wins, on whichever bill, our children continue to be the losers. We all need to change that outcome and I respectfully suggest there is a different road we can meet on to make it happen.

That is why I will be introducing in the next Senate the kind of comprehensive education reform legislation that I believe will provide us a chance to come together not as Democrats and Republicans, but as the true friends of parents, children, teachers, and principals—to come together as citizens—and help our schools reclaim the promise of public education in this country. We need to ask one question: "What provides our children with the best education?" And whether the answer is conservative, liberal, or simply practical, we need to commit ourselves to that course.

As we being to chart that new course, I would remind this body of a conviction shared by all of us: no one in America wants the federal government trespassing on a cherished local prerogative. But the federal government can and should leverage resources to schools everywhere; it can help teachers, parents, administrators, and community leaders take up the work they all agree is so badly needed. To say that there is no federal role in education is to call upon the federal government to abandon 50 million children.

I believe this Senate will reject that notion and accept instead legislation to help every school make a new start on their own, an invitation to all parties in the name of saving public education in America. My bill will be built on challenge grants for schools to pursue comprehensive reform and adopt the proven best practices of any other school funds to help every school become an accountable charter school within the public school system; the incentives to make choice and com-

petition a hallmark of our school systems; and the resources to help schools fix their crumbling infrastructure, get serious about crime, end social promotion, restore a sense of community to our schools, and send children to school ready to learn.

My legislation will begin the Voluntary State Reform Incentive Grants so school districts that choose to finance and implement comprehensive reform based on proven high-performance models can bring forth change. We will target investments at school districts below the national or state median and leverage local dollars through matching grants. This component of the legislation will aim to make every public school in this country essentially a charter school within the public school system—giving them the chance to quickly and easily put in place the best of what works in any other school—private, parochial or public—with decentralized control, site-based management, parental engagement, and high levels of volunteerism—while at the same time meeting high standards of student achievement and public accountability. I believe public schools need to have the chance to make changes not tomorrow, not five years from now, not after another study—but now—today.

And my legislation will help us restore accountability to public education by injecting choice and competition into a public school system badly in need of both. We are not a country that believes in monopolies. We are a country that believes diversity raises quality. We wouldn't accept one source, one company, one choice of food, or clothing or cable television. It is time we end a system that restricts each child to an administrator's choice and not a parent's choice where possible. It is time we adopt a competitive system of public school choice with grants awarded to schools that meet parents' test of quality and assistance to schools that must catch up rapidly. That is why I'll be proposing that we create an incentive for schools all across the nation to adopt public school choice to the extent logistically feasible.

So if schools will embrace this new framework—every school a charter school in the public school system, choice, competition, and accountability—what then are the key ingredients of their excellence?

My legislation will allow our schools to strip away the bureaucracy that stifles creativity and remember that what counts in any public school is how our students fare academically. You don't identify a good school by the number of administrators you hire. In fact, we impose so many rules and regulations on our schools "from above" that we forget teaching happens "on the ground"—in a school building, in a classroom. But you won't find accountability there because it's been fractured and scattered in hundreds of different offices and titles. We need to restore leadership and accountability and

put our faith in our principals—holding them accountable for the way their teachers teach and the way ultimately, their students learn.

That means we need to do better in guaranteeing that every one of our nation's 80,000 principals have the capacity to lead—the talents and the know-how to do the job; effective leadership skills; the vision to create an effective team—to recruit, hire, and transfer teachers and engage parents. Without those abilities, the title of principal and the freedom to lead means little. I'll be proposing an "Excellent Principals Challenge Grant" which would provide funds to local school districts to train principals in sound management skills and effective classroom practices. This bill helps our schools make being a principal the great calling of our time.

But as we set our sights on recruiting a new generation of effective principals, we must acknowledge what today's best principals know: principals can only produce results as good as the teachers with whom they must work. To get the best results, we need the best teachers. And we must act immediately to guarantee that we get the best as the United States hires 2 million new teachers in the next ten years, 60% of them in the next five years. I will be offering legislation that empowers our states and school districts to find new ways to hire and train outstanding teachers: a Teacher Recruitment Incentive Grant, to raise teachers' salaries and attract a larger group of qualified people into the teaching profession; a Ongoing Education Grant to provide continued training for our nation's teachers.

This legislation will allow states to reconfigure their certification policies and their teaching standards to address the reality that our standards for teachers are not high enough—and at the same time, they are too rigid in setting out irrelevant requirements that don't make teaching better; they make it harder for some who choose to teach. We know we need to streamline teacher certification rules in this country to recruit the best college graduates to teach in the United States. Today we hire almost exclusively education majors to teach, and liberal arts graduates are only welcomed in our country's top private schools. My legislation will allow states to rewrite the rules so every principal has the same right as headmasters at private schools—to hire liberal arts graduates as teachers and measure their competency; while at the same time allowing hundreds of thousands more teachers to achieve a more broad based meaningful certification—the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification with its rigorous test of subject matter knowledge and teaching ability.

My legislation will build a new teacher recruitment system for our public schools—providing college scholarships for our highest achieving high school

graduates if they agree to come back and teach in our public schools.

I hope to build support for this legislation around the consensus that we share a common obligation to build a system where every principal and every teacher in every school can be held accountable. Every parent wants that; every child deserves it. And we should all be held accountable if we are unwilling to make those changes. But I also hope to build a consensus in this Senate that recognizes that you can't hold someone accountable if they don't have the tools to succeed.

I also want to help our schools close the resource gap in public education: helping to fix our crumbling schools with a federal tax credit so that 5,000 school districts can rebuild and modernize their buildings; helping to eliminate the crime that turns too many hallways and classrooms into areas of violence by giving school districts incentives to write discipline codes and create "Second Chance" schools with a range of alternatives for chronically disruptive and violent students—everything from short-term in-school crisis centers, to medium duration in-school suspension rooms, to high quality off-campus alternatives; helping every child come to school ready to learn by funding successful, local early childhood development efforts; and making schools the hubs of our communities once more by providing support for after school programs where students receive tutoring, mentoring, and values-based education—the kind of programs that are open to entire communities, making public schools truly public.

Mr. President, I am not just asking Democrats and Republicans to meet where our students are and where our children are educated. I will be offering legislation that helps us do it, that forces not just a debate, but a vote—yes or no, up or down, change or more of the same. Together we can embrace new rights and responsibilities on both sides of the ideological divide and admit that the answer to the crisis of public education is not found in one concept alone—in private school vouchers or bricks and mortar alone. We can find answers for our children by breaking with the past in every respect—breaking with the instinct for the symbolic, and especially the notion that a speech here and there will make education better in this country. It can't and won't. But our hard work together in the coming year—Democrats and Republicans together—can make a difference. Education reform can work in a bi-partisan way. We know that Congressman OBEY and PORTER in the House have succeeded in establishing promising demonstration projects on comprehensive reform—they know this isn't a partisan issue. And there is no shortage of good ideas or leadership here in the Senate—tireless leadership from Senator MOSELEY-BRAUN on the question of crumbling schools; bi-partisan creativity from Senator COATS

and Senator LIEBERMAN with regard to charter schools; and the leadership and passion, of course, of the senior Senator from my state, Senator KENNEDY, who has led the fight in this Senate to reauthorize the Higher Education Act and has provided this body with over 30 years of unrivaled leadership and support for education. I have already begun talking about this legislation with colleagues from both sides of the aisle and the response thus far has been positive. Today I will release a detailed outline of the legislative proposals I am developing, and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues here in the Senate to shape legislation that we can all support—bold legislation that sends the message—finally—to parents and children struggling to find schools that work, and to teachers and principals struggling in schools simultaneously bloated with bureaucracy and starved for resources—to prove to them not just that we hear their cries for help, but that we will respond not with sound bites and salvos, but with real answers.

Mr. President, I ask a brief summary of my education plan be printed in the RECORD.

The summary follows:

A PLAN TO EDUCATE AMERICA'S CHILDREN
TITLE I—VOLUNTARY STATE REFORM INCENTIVE GRANTS

If education reform is to succeed in America's public schools, we must demand nothing less than a comprehensive reform effort. The best public school districts are simultaneously embracing a host of approaches to educating our children: high standards and accountability, sufficient resources, small class sizes, quality teachers, motivated students, effective principals, and engaged parents and community leaders. We must not be half-hearted in our efforts to make reform feasible for every school in this country. We cannot address only one challenge in education and ignore the rest. We must make available the tools for real comprehensive reform so that every aspect of public education functions better and every element of our system is stronger.

So let us now turn to a bold answer: Let's make every public school in this country essentially a charter school within the public school system. Let's give every school the chance to quickly and easily put in place the best of what works in any other school—private, parochial or public—with decentralized control, site-based management, parental engagement, and real accountability.

Several schools across the country have devised ways to accomplish this by raising standards to improve student achievement, lowering class size, improving on-going education for teachers, and reducing unnecessary middle-level bureaucracy. Numerous high-performance school designs have also been created such as the Modern Red Schoolhouse program, the Success for All program, and the new American Schools program. The results of extensive evaluations of these programs have shown that these designs are successful in raising student achievement. Studies show that these many of these successful programs cost less than the national median of basic education revenues per pupil for K-12 school districts. If we brought all schools up to the spending level of the national median, all schools could finance these high-performance school designs. Therefore, we should raise spending to the

state or the national median, whichever is higher, thereby allowing every school district to finance and implement comprehensive reform based on proven high-performance models and teach students to the highest standards (58 percent of school districts are below either the national or their state median). Although money alone will not solve the problems in poor school districts, it is impossible to solve without adequate resources. Rather than piecemeal, fragmented approaches to reform, the Comprehensive School Reform program is intended to foster coherent schoolwide improvements that cover virtually all aspects of a school's operations.

To ensure that the vast majority of school districts could engage in comprehensive school reform, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) should also be fully funded. Title I is the primary federal help for local districts to provide assistance to poor students in basic math and reading skills. Title I currently provides help to local school districts for additional staff and resources for reading and math, curriculum improvements, smaller classes, and training poor students' parents to help their children learn to read and do math. However, Title I only reaches two-thirds of poor students because of inadequate funding. Since 90 percent of school districts receive at least some Title I funds, fully funding Title I and allowing school districts to use these additional funds for comprehensive reforms would give schools the ability to implement comprehensive reforms so that all students reach the highest academic standards.

Most poor school districts lack the resources to meet the vital educational needs of all of their students. A well-crafted program with the federal and state governments working in close cooperation with one another could make major studies in closing these gaps and improving student performance.

Comprehensive school reform will help raise student achievement by assisting public schools across the country to implement effective, comprehensive school reforms that are based on proven, research-based models. No new federal bureaucracy would be established—the program would be implemented at the state level. Furthermore, no funds could be used to increase the school bureaucracy. School districts would implement a comprehensive school reform program and evaluate and measure results achieved. Schools would also provide high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training, have measurable goals for student performance and benchmarks for meeting those goals, provide for meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement, and identify how other available federal, state, local, or private resources will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform effort.

The funding for the program would move towards the goal of providing every school district in the country enough funds to implement a high quality, performance-based model of comprehensive school reform at a cost of \$4,270. This would mean providing enough funds to bring every district up to the state or the national median, whichever is higher (it is estimated that \$30 billion annually would be needed to bring the per-pupil expenditure of every school district up to the national or state average). To move towards this goal, the federal government would provide funds and states would match this money (states would provide 10 to 20 percent with poorer states providing a smaller match). To receive these funds, states would have to provide a minimum spending effort

based on state and local school spending relative to the state's per capita income. Funding would be \$250 million in FY99, \$500 million in FY2000, \$750 million in FY2001, \$1 billion in FY2002 and \$4 billion in FY2003.

Fully fund Title I so almost all school districts would receive some funds to implement comprehensive school reform (90 percent of all local school districts receive Title funds). Funding would be \$200 million in FY99, \$400 million in FY2000, \$600 million in FY2001, \$1 billion in FY2002, and \$4 billion in FY2003.

TITLE II—ENSURE THAT CHILDREN BEGIN SCHOOL READY TO LEARN

Recent scientific evidence conclusively demonstrates that enhancing children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development will result in tremendous benefits. Many local communities across the country have developed successful early childhood efforts and with additional resources could expand and enhance opportunities for young children. We must enhance private, local, and state early successful support programs for young children by providing resources to expand and/or initiate successful efforts for at-risk children from birth to age six.

Provide funds to States to make grants to local early childhood development collaboratives. States would fund parent education and home visiting classes and have great flexibility to decide whether to also support quality child care, helping schools stay open later for early childhood development activities, or health services for young children. Communities would be required to document their unmet needs and how they would use the funds to improve outcomes for young children so they begin school ready to learn. Funding would be \$100 million in FY99, \$200 million in FY2000, \$300 million in FY2001, \$400 million in FY2002, and \$1 billion in FY2002.

TITLE III—EXCELLENT PRINCIPALS CHALLENGE GRANT

Principals face long hours, high stress, and too little pay. To overcome these obstacles, principals in successful schools must have effective leadership skills. However, too few principals get the training they need in management skills to ensure their school provides an excellent education for every child. Attracting, training, and retaining excellent principals is essential to helping every local school district become world class.

Establish a grant program to states to provide funds to local school districts to attract and to provide professional development for elementary and secondary school principals. Activities would include developing management and business skills, knowledge of effective instructional skills and practices, learning about educational technology, etc. Funding would be \$20 million per year. States and local school districts would contribute 25 percent of the total although poor school districts would be exempt from the match.

TITLE IV—ESTABLISH "SECOND CHANCE" SCHOOLS FOR TROUBLED STUDENTS

Parents, students, and educators know that serious school reform cannot succeed without an orderly and safe learning environment. The few students who are unwilling or unable to comply with discipline codes and make learning impossible for the other students need behavior management programs and high quality alternative placements. Suspending or expelling chronically disruptive or violent students is not effective in the long run since these students will fall behind in school and may cause additional trouble since they are frequently completely unsupervised; these students need alternative placements that provide supervision,

remediation of behavior and maintenance of academic progress. Although some may resist this program for fear that it will be used to isolate disabled students, the purpose is to provide additional interventions for troubled students, not to change disciplinary actions against disabled students.

Add a new title to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to establish a competitive state grant program for school districts to establish "Second Chance" programs. To receive the funds school districts must enact district-wide discipline codes which use clear language with specific examples of behaviors that will result in disciplinary action and have every student and parent sign the code. Additionally, schools may use the funds to promote effective classroom management; provide training for school staff and administrators in enforcement of the code; implement programs to modify student behavior including hiring school counselors; and establish high quality alternative placements for chronically disruptive and violent students that include a continuum of alternatives from meeting with behavior management specialists, to short-term in-school crisis centers, to medium duration in-school suspension rooms, to off-campus alternatives. Funding would be \$100 million per year and distributed to states through the Title I formula.

TITLE V—TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND ON-GOING EDUCATION INCENTIVE GRANT

Approximately 61,000 first-time teachers begin in our nation's public schools each year. Since the average starting salary for teachers is a little more than \$21,000 per year, we need to raise their compensation to attract a larger group of qualified people into the teaching profession. Since the average student loan debt of students graduating college who borrowed money for college is \$9,068, the most effective way to provide federal assistance to states to raise teachers' salaries is to provide loan forgiveness. In addition, scholarships ought to be available to the most talented high school students in every state in return for a commitment to teach in our public schools (North Carolina has successfully recruited future teachers from within public high schools with the lure of college scholarships).

States would be given funds to provide poor school districts the ability to raise teacher salaries to attract and retain the best teachers. Funding would be provided through the Title I "targeted grant" formula (the minimum threshold would be 20% poor children or 20,000 poor children). Funding would be \$500 million for FY 99, \$500 million in FY 2000, \$1 billion in FY 2001, \$1 billion in FY 2002, and \$2 billion in FY 2003. Additionally, full-time state certified public school teachers who teach in low-income areas or who teach in areas with teacher shortages such as math, science, and special needs would have 20 percent of their student loans forgiven after two years of teaching, an additional 20 percent after three years, an additional 30 percent after four years, and the remaining 30 percent after five years. The program would be funded at \$50 million each year. Finally, an additional \$10 million would be provided as grants to states that wish to provide signing bonuses for first-time teachers who teach in low-income areas or areas with teacher shortages.

Provide \$10 million in grants for states to establish a program to provide college scholarships to the top 20 percent of SAT achievers or grade point average in each state's high school graduating class in return for a commitment to become a state certified teacher for five years. States would contribute 20 percent of the funds for the scholarships. Five percent of the total funds could

be used by local school districts to hire staff to recruit at the top liberal arts, education, and technical colleges (districts would be encouraged to establish a central regional recruiting office to pool their resources). One percent of the total funds would be used by the Secretary of Education to create a national hotline for potential teachers to receive information on a career in teaching.

TITLE VI—TEACHER QUALITY ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

We need to provide on-going education in teaching skills and academic content knowledge, establish or expand alternative routes to state certification, and establish or expand mentoring programs for prospective teachers by veteran teachers (according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, beginning teachers who have had the continuous support of a skilled mentor are more likely to stay in the profession).

Establish Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, a competitive grant awarded to states to improve teaching. The grants would have a matching requirement and must be used to institute state-level reforms to ensure that current and future teachers possess the necessary teaching skills and academic content knowledge in the subject areas they are assigned to teach. In addition, establish Teacher Training Partnership Grants, designed to encourage reform at the local level to improve teacher training. One of the uses of these funds would be for states to establish, expand, or improve alternative routes to state certification for highly qualified individuals from other occupations such as business executives and recent college graduates with records of academic distinction. Another use would be to mentor prospective teachers by veteran teachers. Provide \$100 million per year for these new teacher training programs so that states can improve teacher quality, establish or expand alternative routes to state certification for new teachers, and mentor new teachers by veteran teachers.

TITLE VII—INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

As many as five million children are home alone after school each week. Most juvenile involvement in crime—either committing crime or becoming victims themselves—occurs between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Children who attend quality after-school programs, however, tend to do better in school, get along better with their peers, and are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Expansion of both school-based and community-based after-school programs will provide safe, developmentally appropriate environments for children and help communities reduce the incidents of juvenile delinquency and crime. In addition, many states and localities such as Maryland and the Chicago public school system require high school students to perform community service to receive a high school diploma. The real world experience helps prepare students for work and instills a sense of civic duty.

Expand the 21st Century Learning Centers Act by providing \$400 million each fiscal year to help communities provide after-school care. Grantees will be required to offer expanded learning opportunities for children and youth in the community. Funds could be used by school districts to provide: literacy programs; integrated education, health, social service, recreational or cultural programs; summer and weekend school programs; nutrition and health programs; expanded library services, telecommunications and technology education programs; services for individuals with disabilities; job skills assistance; mentoring; academic assistance; and drug, alcohol and gang prevention activities.

Provide \$10 million in grants to states that have established or chose to establish a state-wide or a district-wide program that requires high school students to perform community service to receive a high school diploma. States would determine what constitutes community service, the number of hours required, and whether to exempt some low-income students who hold full-time jobs while attending school full-time. The grants would be matched dollar for dollar with half of the match coming from the state and local education agencies and half coming from the private sector.

TITLE VIII—EXPAND THE NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which is headed by Gov. Jim Hunt, established rigorous standards and assessments for certifying accomplished teaching. To pass the exam and be certified, teachers must demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a series of performance-based assessments which include teaching portfolios, student work samples, videotapes and rigorous analyses of their classroom teaching and student learning. Additionally, teachers must take written tests of their subject-matter knowledge and their understanding of how to teach those subjects to their students. The National Board certification is offered to teachers on a voluntary basis and complements but does not replace state licensing. The National Commission on Teaching for America's Future called for a goal of 105,000 board certified teachers by the year 2006 (since the exam began recently, only about 2,000 teachers are currently board certified). Since the exam costs \$2,000, many teachers are currently unable to afford it.

Provide \$189 million over five years so that states have enough money to provide a 90% subsidy for the National Board certification of 105,000 teachers across the country.

TITLE IX—HELP COMMUNITIES TO MODERNIZE AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

More than 14 million children in America attend schools in need of extensive repair or replacement. According to a comprehensive survey by the General Accounting Office (GAO) requested by Senator Moseley-Braun, Senator Kerry and others, the repair backlog totals \$112 billion. Researchers at Georgetown University found that the performance of students assigned to schools in poor condition fall by 10.9 percentage points below those in buildings in excellent condition.

To help rebuild modernize, and build over 5,000 public schools, provide federal tax credits to school districts to pay interest on nearly \$22 billion in bonds at a cost of \$5 billion over five years.

TITLE X—ENCOURAGE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

Many public schools have implemented public school choice programs where students may enroll at any public school in the public school system. In contrast to vouchers for private schools, public school choice increases options for students but does not use public funds to finance private schools which remain entirely unaccountable to taxpayers.

Provide \$20 million annually in grants to states that choose to implement public school choice programs. School districts could spend the funds on transportation and other services to implement a successful public school choice program. Up to 10 percent of the funds may be spent by a school district to improve low performing school districts that lose students due to the public school choice program.●

CAMBODIA: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

● Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the latest developments in Cambodia and my thoughts on how the United States should respond to these developments.

Over the past decade the United States has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars towards peace in Cambodia. What benefit has been achieved as a result of this assistance? Is Cambodia better off now than it was 10 years ago? I would argue that recent political developments have undercut most gains this assistance may have provided—and worse, our own policies have contributed to the most recent deterioration considerably.

On July 26 of this year, the Cambodian people turned out in overwhelming numbers to vote in parliamentary elections. The ruling government pointed to this impressive turnout and claimed it was representative of a free and fair process. In fact, the election was termed by one American observer as the "Miracle on the Mekong." With all due respect, I question how any informed observer could make that evaluation. For one to believe this appraisal, one must completely ignore the events dating from the 1997 coup.

In truth, the events which lead up to the July 26 balloting made the prospects for free and fair elections impossible. The opposition parties infrastructure had been completely dismantled following the July 1997 coup d'etat, orchestrated by Hun Sen and his Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP). As many as 100 opposition party members were reported killed, and those who remained in Cambodia were forced to campaign in fear if they dared speak out at all. The CPP controlled access to media and thereby prevented opposition candidates from effectively getting their message out. The National Election Commission (NEC), which had oversight of the election process, was stacked almost entirely with CPP party loyalists. Each of these factors on their own would be troubling, but when looked at collectively they are an outrageous example of a government which acts with impunity and has no regard for democratic principles.

Despite this reality, the Clinton Administration joined many in the international community, including the so-called "Friends of Cambodia," in pushing the parties to participate in the July 26 elections. I thought then, and I continue to believe now, that this was a mistake. To use an old phrase—with "Friends" like these, who needs enemies? How could we ask these brave men and women to risk their lives and take part in a process which was doomed to failure? To make matters worse, the U.S. Government now seems bent on ignoring the reality of the flawed election. Rather, it is pushing opposition leaders to participate in a parliament at the mercy of a brutal dictator who has no regard for the rule