

done, and I thank all those who cooperated in helping to get it done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FITZGERALD). The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Thank you, Mr. President. For the benefit of my colleagues, I will be finished in 5 minutes.

FIT GUN CONTROL

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I seek recognition because my comments follow on the same topic as the Senator from Utah, who I know wants very much to have a juvenile justice bill. But as I listened to his comments, I fear that perhaps we are not headed in the right direction with that legislation.

Yesterday, I know that all of us were shocked, as all Americans were, to hear about a gunman walking into the back of a church in Ft. Worth, TX, killing six people, wounding seven, and then killing himself.

I have a very simple message for my colleagues. If you can't feel safe from gun violence in the sanctuary of your church, where can you feel safe?

On Tuesday, in a story in my home State, not even widely reported, a man walked into the West Anaheim Medical Center and killed three hospital workers because he was grief stricken that his mother died in that hospital. He went on the hunt for particular nurses. If you can't feel safe from gun violence in a hospital in America, where can you feel safe?

What seems like yesterday is actually a couple of months now when in the Los Angeles region of California a crazed man walked into a Jewish center where there was a child care operation and shot his weapon. I will never forget the picture of the police holding the hands of that tiny little toddler as they tried to escape from the situation.

These are memories that are imprinted in our minds. If we don't do anything about it in this Senate, we do not deserve to call ourselves the Senate, let alone the greatest deliberative body in the world.

I feared, as I listened to the comments of the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, he seems to be saying that if we insist on modest gun control measures that are already in the Senate version, somehow we are playing politics.

I want to say right here in the most straightforward way I can that it is not playing politics to say we should keep guns out of the hands of criminals and people who are mentally disturbed and out of the hands of children. That is not playing politics. That is doing what needs to be done in America in 1999 going into the next century.

The modest gun control measures that we passed on this floor of the Senate—those modest measures that the Vice President cast the tie breaking vote for—are common sense and close the gun show loophole that allows criminals and mentally unbalanced

people to walk into a gun show and immediately get a weapon. It is common sense to stop that.

Senator LAUTENBERG's amendment would do so.

Senator FEINSTEIN's amendment on banning the importation of high-capacity ammunition clips which are used in semiautomatic weapons—common sense.

Senator KOHL's amendment requiring that child safety devices be sold with every handgun—common sense.

My own amendment asking the FTC and the Attorney General to study the extent to which the gun industry markets to children—common sense.

The Ashcroft amendment making it illegal to sell or give a semiautomatic weapon to anyone under the age of 18—that is all we did in that bill.

Yet we have the chairman of the Judiciary Committee out here talking as if, my goodness, those measures were political.

Listen. I don't think the American people can stand this anymore.

In closing my remarks, I am going to mention some of the shootings that took place in 1999.

January 14, office building, Salt Lake City, Utah, one dead, one injured;

March 18, law office, Johnson City, Tennessee, two dead;

April 15, Mormon Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, three dead, including gunman (who was shot by police), four injured;

April 20, Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado, 15 dead, including the two teenage gunmen, 23 injured;

May 20, Heritage High School, Conyers, Georgia, six injured;

June 3, grocery store, Las Vegas, Nevada, four dead;

June 11, psychiatrist's clinic, Southfield, Michigan, three dead, including the gunman, four injured;

July 12, private home, Atlanta, Georgia, seven dead, including the gunman;

July 29, two brokerage firms, Atlanta, Georgia, 10 dead, including the gunman, 13 injured;

August 5, two office buildings, Pelham, Alabama, three dead;

August 10, North Valley Jewish Community Center, Los Angeles, California, five injured (Postal worker killed later);

September 14, West Anaheim Medical Center, Anaheim, California, three dead; and, just last night,

September 15, Wedgwood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, seven dead, including gunman, seven injured.

That is a partial list.

We have to do something. We have the opportunity. What are we waiting for? I have to say that if we cannot vote out these modest gun control proposals which are common sense, and if we cannot pick up some votes from the other side of the aisle, including the President who is sitting in the Chair, if we can't do that, we should be ashamed to go home and say we did the people's business.

Thank you very much.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Thank you.

THE CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to speak on issues that are of importance to us. I will take the next 5 minutes to speak about a subject that is important to many Members of this body—something that over 20 of us have been working on now very diligently on both the House side, as well as the Senate, Republican and Democrat, to bring closure to this year in this Congress.

I come to the floor very appropriately today as this terrible storm, Floyd, actually rages outside of this building. The wind and the rain have battered this building as we have worked through the day. Of course, we feel relatively blessed in that the storm damage has been kept to a minimum. It is quite a deadly storm and quite a tremendous threat.

There are schoolchildren and families at home throughout the entire eastern portion of our Nation because they have been unable to get to work, or to school, or to other places because of the storm.

I want to speak for a few minutes about the Conservation and Reinvestment Act and how it will help us deal not with the emergency of the storm, not necessarily with the specific preparation for a particular storm, but how this particular bill by rededicating a portion of our offshore oil and gas revenues could be used by States and counties and coastal areas throughout the United States to help repair damages from these particular storms.

I want to take a minute to thank some Governors and Senators and to read a few statements into the RECORD about some of their thoughts regarding this bill.

As this storm moves through the eastern part of our Nation today, and hopefully will dissipate over the next few hours, we have experienced tremendous damage. Since 1960, the United States has sustained over \$50 billion in damage. From Florida to Louisiana, to Texas, to South and North Carolina and Virginia, many coastal States have been battered over and over by hurricanes just since 1960.

In a major publication last week, one of the headlines was reminding us of the deadly storm that literally wiped out Galveston, TX, in the year 1900. It is now the 99th anniversary of one of the deadliest storms to ever hit the United States.

While some on this floor might argue, what is the reason for setting aside a specific amount of money to help coastal States, I suggest what we see on television now says it better than I could say it on the floor of the Senate. We see storms of this magnitude pounding the coast, we see them

season after season, gulf coast to east coast, sometimes very big storms on the western coast, washing away our beaches, eroding our barrier islands, causing tremendous damage.

It is important for this Senate to act now, while we have the opportunity, to set aside a portion of our offshore oil and gas revenues, to join in partnership with our local officials, Governors and county commissioners, to help, whether the hurricane season is tough or not, whether we are in the mood for it or not, for Congress to provide a permanent source of revenue, year in and year out, to help with these matters. That is what S. 25 will provide. Hopefully, in a few weeks we will be marking up this bill.

I will read into the RECORD and specifically thank several Governors who have experienced over the last days the effects of Hurricane Floyd. I begin by thanking Governor Roy Barnes of the State of Georgia, whose State was spared the brunt of this particular storm but who did a beautiful job preparing the people of Florida, along with the emergency personnel.

I read from his letter:

This legislation [referring to S. 25] would provide critically needed funding for a variety of wildlife-conservation, land conservation, and coastal-area projects in Georgia. I fully support this legislation and ask you to work for its passage.

Jim Hodges, Governor of South Carolina, who probably hasn't slept in the last 48 hours as his State has been battered by this storm, wrote a couple of months ago:

South Carolina has a unique diversity of natural resources which we must strive to conserve for future generations.

The current proposal which provides for a dedicated and secure funding source has long-term significance for both our natural resources and the people who enjoy all types of outdoor recreation. The plans embodied in CARA are high priorities for South Carolina. These include: coastal zone management and impact assistance, wetlands restoration, state and local outdoor recreation programs, fish and wildlife conservation, and environmental education.

He goes on to say:

Congress enacted the Coastal Management Act in 1972 to preserve, restore and enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone.

Mr. President, S. 25 is structured in such a way that it can build on that good work. I thank Governor Jim Hodges of South Carolina for having the forethought and not waiting for the hurricanes, for thinking ahead as to how we could provide some much needed dollars to minimize the cost of the damage that has been caused.

Governor Jim Hunt of North Carolina writes:

We are making significant progress in North Carolina to enhance and protect our environment and public spaces. We have made historic commitments this year to the expansion of public lands in our western mountains, and we recognize the value of our public spaces for assuring a prosperous and livable future.

I thank these Governors for their leadership and acknowledge the fact

that Governor Whitman, who was also prepared for the effects of this storm, was here in the Capitol not that many months ago stating her case for why we should come to the aid of States and local governments to help protect our coasts, to provide funding that will help to restore beaches, and to help with hurricane evacuation and the infrastructure necessary to provide for the fact that over two-thirds of the people in the United States live within 50 miles of a coast.

The State of Louisiana is happy to provide a lot of this money, or a great portion of it, from our oil and gas resources. I say thanks to Senator CAMPBELL from Colorado; to Senator BREAU; to Senator COCHRAN; Senator KIT BOND; Senator TIM JOHNSON; Senator MIKULSKI; Senator SESSIONS from Alabama, a sister southern State; Senator CLELAND from Georgia; Senator LOTT; Senator MURKOWSKI, the chairman of our committee; Senator LINCOLN from Arkansas; Senator BUNNING; Senator BAYH; Senator COVERDELL; Senator FRIST; Senator ROBB; Senator TIM HUTCHINSON from Arkansas; Senator BOB KERREY from an interior State; and Senator ROBERTS from Kansas, another interior State. I thank these Senators for joining the broad coalition of Senators both from our coastal and interior States recognizing hurricanes are dangerous and can have devastating impact to life and to property.

While we have all sorts of programs in effect—flood insurance and emergency preparedness—if we could spend a small amount of money matching the efforts that States and local governments do year in and year out, we could help to preserve the precious resources that are literally washed away season after season.

I believe the American people want Congress to help. I believe they think we have the resources to do so. Mostly, I believe they think this is the year we should act. Let's not wait until another storm rips up another part of our coastline. Let's act in the next few months, as this Congress comes to a close, to adopt this important piece of legislation.

I thank these Senators for their hard work and acknowledge the work of Chairman MURKOWSKI and acknowledge the work of Members of the House, Chairman YOUNG and others in the House who are working on a similar proposal. I thank the Presiding Officer for his interest in this particular piece of legislation.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD several letters I discussed as well as the costs of hurricanes in this century.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

STATE OF GEORGIA,
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR,
Atlanta, GA, February 10, 1999.

Hon. JACK KINGSTON,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE KINGSTON: The U.S. Congress is presently considering some important conservation legislation that would benefit Georgia. The Conservation and Reinvestment Act was introduced in the Senate (S. 25) on January 19 and similar legislation is expected to be introduced in the House soon. This legislation would provide critically needed funding for a variety of wildlife-conservation, land conservation and coastal-area projects in Georgia. I fully support this legislation and ask you to work for its passage.

The Conservation and Reinvestment Act would dedicate 50% or more of annual revenues from offshore gas and oil leases—projected at \$4.59 billion in the year 2000—into three separate funds. Georgia would receive a wide range of benefits from each of these titles as follows:

Title I would dedicate 27% of annual offshore oil and gas revenue to coastal states and local communities. For impact assistance, including environmental remediation and infrastructure needs. Georgia would receive approximately \$5.8 million annually for air and water quality improvements, coastal zone management, beach replenishment and similar activities.

Title II would dedicate 16% in S. 25 or 23% in the 1998 House version of offshore oil and gas revenue for funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Programs. Georgia's share would be roughly \$8 million annually. I prefer the House version since more funding would come to the states.

Title III deals with Wildlife Conservation and Restoration. This section would dedicate 10% in the House version or 7% in S. 25 of offshore oil and gas revenue to fund state-level wildlife conservation, wildlife education and wildlife associated recreation projects, such as hiking trails, education centers and programs, and other wildlife conservation projects. Georgia's share of this money would be approximately \$8 million annually in the House version which I favor.

These bills would provide a much needed, permanent funding source to meet a variety of environmental conservation needs that face our growing state. I encourage you to use your influence to help reconcile these bills in the House and Senate to ensure their passage. It is important that states receive as much of this funding as possible to address critical conservation needs here at home.

Thank you in advance for your support of the legislation.

Kindest regards.

Sincerely,

ROY E. BARNES.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR,
Columbia, SC, March 1, 1999.

Mr. R. MAX PETERSON,
Executive Vice-President, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PETERSON: It is with great pleasure that I write to you to endorse the principles embodied in "Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999 (CARA)," which was recently introduced in the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives introduction in the near future. South Carolina has a unique diversity of national resources which we must strive to conserve for future generations.

The current proposal which provides for a dedicated and secure funding source has

long-term significance for both our natural resources and the people who enjoy all types of outdoor recreation. The plans embodied in CARA are high priorities for South Carolina. These include: coastal zone management and impact assistance, wetlands restoration, state and local outdoor recreation programs, fish and wildlife conservation, and environmental education.

Congress enacted the Coastal Zone Management Act in 1972 to preserve, restore and enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone. Title I of CARA will allow South Carolina to partner with the federal government in managing our coastal zone for the improvement of air and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and wetlands protection.

Title II will restore funding for the Land and Water Conservation fund, allowing a continuation of the process of building a national network of parks, recreation and conservation areas to touch all communities. This reinvests assets of lasting value for all Americans.

I am particularly pleased that Title III of the legislation includes the principles from the original "Teaming with Wildlife" initiative, and I trust that the language will ultimately provide the states with the means to protect and manage the vast majority of wildlife species which presently have no reliable source of funding. I am hopeful that the final bill will dedicate 10% of the annual revenue to Title III, as was proposed in the House version last year.

I am impressed by the strong bipartisan support in Congress for the CARA concept and I will be working with South Carolina's delegation to secure their support. As a newly elected governor, I have a clear vision of the legacy that I want to leave the citizens of South Carolina in general and our children in particular. A critical component of my campaign platform included increasing the quantity and quality of education opportunities in this state. This legislation will not only help conserve natural areas and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, but also promote conservation education programs for coming generations.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of our valuable natural resources.

Sincerely,

JIM HODGES,
Governor.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR,
Raleigh, SC, December 8, 1998.

The President,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I am writing to congratulate you on your success with environmental initiatives in the past year, and to urge inclusion of a significant environmental and conservation funding package supported by offshore energy royalties in your FY 2000 Budget.

We are making significant progress in North Carolina to enhance and protect our environment and our public spaces. We have made historic commitments this year to the expansion of public lands in our western mountains, and we recognize the value of our public spaces for assuring a prosperous and livable future. We are aware of interest in Congress, among the conservation and environmental communities, and elsewhere in proposals for a truly significant recommitment of available offshore royalty revenues to preserve and enhance public lands, parks and recreation, wildlife habitat, coastal protections, and other vital natural concerns. This type of legislative package would put in place an ongoing source of funds to support federal and state needs and enable us to fulfill important environmental and conservation goals.

This would also be a fitting and winning follow up to your successes this year with the American Heritage Rivers Initiative and Clean Water Action Plan. I hope you can include this type of broad conservation initiative supported by offshore energy revenues in your priorities for the FY 2000 Budget.

My warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,

JAMES B. HUNT JR.

TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, WASHINGTON, D.C., TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 1999

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify on the various legislative proposals before the Committee that address land and natural resources conservation.

States and local governments are leading the way in the preservation of land and natural resources, and we welcome federal efforts that build on and complement what we are already doing.

I want to applaud the Committee and the sponsors of the various bills for the bipartisan and inclusive process that recognizes the critical role of state and local governments in preserving and protecting natural resources.

Before I comment specifically on the federal legislation, I would like to briefly discuss what we have already done in New Jersey.

By way of background, New Jersey is a state of 8 million people living on 5 million acres. Ours is the most densely populated state in the country, yet it maintains five national wildlife areas, two national park areas, three nationally designated estuaries, the internationally recognized and environmentally sensitive New Jersey Pinelands, and 127 miles of ocean shoreline.

The Garden State has made consistent and aggressive efforts to preserve and protect its natural resources. In fact, between 1961 and 1995, our voters approved bond issues totaling more than \$1.4 billion to acquire 390,000 acres of open space, protect 50,000 acres of farmland, preserve historic sites, and develop parks. And last November, by a 2-to-1 margin, New Jersey voters approved a long-term stable source of funding to preserve forever 1 million additional acres of open space and farmland.

Saving our precious land is the centerpiece of New Jersey's effort to build a future in which we can sustain both the strength of our economy and the integrity of our environment.

That effort includes directing future growth to areas that have the infrastructure already in place, such as our cities and town centers. In support of that effort, we are working hard to revitalize our cities as thriving centers of culture and commerce. We are also committing some of our preservation funds to protect and preserve our most significant historic treasures.

New Jersey's commitment to land preservation dates back to the 1960s. Since 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery program have provided New Jersey with over \$145 million in matching funds to acquire open space and develop and maintain recreational facilities and urban parks.

Some recent projects the Land and Water Conservation Fund has supported include the first county park in Hudson County in 80 years and the development of Liberty State Park, one of New Jersey's most culturally and historically significant attractions.

Clearly, while my state will continue to make open space preservation a priority, the

need to preserve land exceeds state and local funding levels, particularly given the federal government's decision in 1995 to stop the flow of land and water conservation funds to the states.

Restoring the stateside funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund would assist New Jersey's open space and farmland preservation efforts by enhancing our ability to partner with local governments and non-profit agencies in order to achieve our million acre goal.

Mr. Chairman, an important priority in New Jersey is preserving our farmland, and I would encourage the Committee to allow Land and Water Conservation Fund money to be used to purchase farmland conservation easements to assist us in this effort.

When it comes to wildlife, the reinvestment of Outer Continental Shelf revenues will enable states to ensure that we bequeath to our children and grandchildren healthy and abundant species populations with adequate habitat.

Federal funding would allow New Jersey to fully implement projects that protect critical wildlife habitats and species and encourage private landowners to do the same. We have saved the peregrine falcon and the osprey, and we have increased the number of nesting bald eagles from one pair in 1988 to 22 pairs in 1999. Increased revenue would allow New Jersey to continue these efforts and develop a strategic plan for the preservation of all species and their habitat.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to comment on the coastal impact assistance provision in your proposal. The New Jersey coast generates more than \$20 billion per year. Supporting a thriving coastline is critical to our economy and our environment. Coastal impact assistance could be used for vital projects such as restoring beaches, dunes, and wetlands as well as state and local smart growth planning.

New Jersey does not have oil and gas exploration or production off our coast, and we support the existing moratorium on oil and gas production off New Jersey's coast.

Members of the Committee, I recognize that approving the proposals before you would require a shift in the budgets of other federal programs. It is important that funds provided to states under this legislation not come at the expense of other federally supported state programs.

I do believe, however, that since Outer Continental Shelf revenues come from a non-renewable resource, it makes sense to dedicate them to natural resource conservation rather than dispersing them for general government purposes.

I would urge the Committee to give state and local governments maximum flexibility in determining how to invest these funds. In this way, federal resources can be tailored to complement state plans, priorities, and resources.

I look forward to continuing to work with you as this legislation moves forward. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on an issue of great importance to New Jersey and the nation. I would be happy to answer any questions.

THE COSTLIEST HURRICANES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1996

Ranking: Hurricane	Year	Cat-egory	Damage (U.S.)
1. Andrew (SE FL/SE LA)	1992	4	\$26,500,000,000
2. Hugo (SC)	1989	4	7,000,000,000
3. Fran (NC)	1996	3	3,200,000,000
4. Opal (NW FL/AL)	1995	3	3,000,000,000
5. Frederic (AL/MS)	1979	3	2,300,000,000
6. Agnes (NE U.S.)	1972	1	2,100,000,000
7. Alicia (N TX)	1983	3	2,000,000,000
8. Bob (NC and NE U.S.)	1991	2	1,500,000,000

THE COSTLIEST HURRICANES IN THE UNITED STATES,
1900–1996—Continued

Ranking: Hurricane	Year	Cat- egory	Damage (U.S.)
9. Juan (LA)	1985	1	1,500,000,000
10. Camille (MS/AL)	1969	5	1,420,700,000
11. Betsy (FL/LA)	1965	3	1,420,500,000
12. Elena (MS/AL/NW FL)	1985	3	1,250,000,000
13. Gloria (Eastern U.S.)	1985	3	900,000,000
14. Diane (NE U.S.)	1955	1	831,700,000
15. Erin (Central & NW FL/SW AL)	1995	2	700,000,000
16. Allison (N TX)	1989	T.S.	500,000,000
16. Alberto (NW FL/GA/AL)	1994	T.S.	500,000,000
18. Eloise (NW FL)	1975	3	490,000,000
19. Carol (NE U.S.)	1954	3	461,000,000
20. Celia (S TX)	1970	3	453,000,000
21. Carla (TX)	1961	4	408,000,000
22. Claudette (N TX)	1979	T.S.	400,000,000
22. Gordon (S & Cent. FL/NC)	1994	T.S.	400,000,000
24. Donna (FL/Eastern U.S.)	1960	4	387,000,000

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I rise, as did my other colleagues today, to talk about something of great importance to each Member individually. I think we have not taken full advantage to discuss what I think is our greatest blessing in this world, one of our greatest investments. That is our children.

Today I will discuss the importance of education funding and why it is imperative the Senate act quickly and responsibly on this issue. We have an opportunity to do something on behalf of our children, to give them the capability they need. We talk about the magnitude of education on behalf of our children, but we don't often talk about the timeliness that is needed here on this issue today.

I question the wisdom of delaying the vote on the appropriations bill that funds education, the Labor-HHS bill, until after we have completed the other 12 spending bills. I know for myself, as a working mother, and as do all of my colleagues here as working family individuals—we have to prioritize. We have to look at what is important and we make a list. We recognize what is important and then we go about accomplishing it. It seems our priorities are in the wrong place when we vote on the legislative appropriations bill before funding education, waiting until the last minute, the last issue, to try and drum up the necessary funding to educate our children for the future.

School has started all over this country. Kids are taking tests; they are turning in papers; they are getting grades. We, as parents, as aunts and uncles, as mentors to our children all over this country, are encouraging them to aim for the best, to work towards that A, to do what it is they can to accomplish their best, to work hard at their education because it will pay off for them in the end.

What are we doing? We are setting a very poor example. If this Congress was to be graded on its performance on prioritizing our children's education, it would be given a big red F.

I know there is always a contentious debate over how to fund education, but it seems our colleagues on the Republican side are out of touch with the American people on this issue. A recent survey of the American public found

that 73 percent of Americans favor increased Federal investment in education and placed it as the highest priority among the 19 other issues they were asked about. Yet we in Washington have failed to act, and the situation is only getting worse.

During the August recess, instead of having townhall meetings, I set about having five back-to-school meetings across our State of Arkansas. I spent a great deal of time listening to parents, students, teachers, and school administrators at all of these different schools in these meetings that I organized across our State. One school superintendent told me that in his area, an enormously depressed area, they were starting the school year with 22 job openings; short 22 people in that school district. As a result, classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are overworked, and students are not receiving the kind of attention and education they deserve. We must send Federal money immediately to hire new teachers. We must look for incentives to get our young people into teaching.

Do you realize the enormous brick wall we will hit soon, as we are having fewer and fewer of our young people going into the teaching profession? It doesn't matter if we have smaller class sizes or if we have new school buildings; we are not going to have the teachers to put in them. That is essential.

We want to give our teachers the capability to be well qualified. We send our children to school 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Teachers are some of the most important people in their lives, and they are not given the appropriate time to prepare nor are they receiving the reasonable accommodation in resources they need to be able to teach our children. We must send those Federal dollars to hire new teachers. Waiting until next year is not an option. Schools are already open this year. If we wait as planned, we will have missed an entire grade of children.

I have talked to my colleagues: Oh, we won't get to that this year, or we will do it next year, or we will do it in the next Congress. Think about those years. Think about those first graders from this year. They will be second graders next year and then third graders. By the time we have finally done something on their behalf, we will have missed the most critical stage in their educational process. How irresponsible on our part.

By the time the money is allocated and school districts can begin to make those hiring decisions, they have missed that opportunity. Our children will be the ones who suffer if we do not do the right thing in the Senate. I also think it is such a shame, as we look at the tax package that has been presented to the President, what it will do in robbing our children of the money that is needed to build new schools, hire new teachers, reduce class size, wire classrooms with the latest technology, and enhance the access to affordable higher education.

Under the Republican plan that has been presented to the President, education funding will be cut by 17 percent. How inexcusable is that, our greatest resource in this Nation, our children, our future, and not even anteing up what we need to do to meet those needs. That is an embarrassment.

It is in our Nation's long-term interest to give our children the very best, highest quality education that we can. But even if we would not do it for our children, should we not do it for our Nation? That is the future of our Nation, our children, their capability to compete with other children across this globe. We should make that a priority in the Senate. The American people have indicated to us that they have made it a priority on their wish list. They are the future of our workforce. They are the future of our country. If we fail our children, we have failed our Nation.

So I rise today to encourage my Senate colleagues to reconsider their priorities and to support public schools by restoring full funding to education and supporting efforts to hire more teachers, to build more schools, and to establish valuable afterschool programs. Now is the time to act—not next year, not next Congress, but right here and right now. Let's get over the partisan bickering and political posturing and get on with the people's work.

More important, let's move beyond the process posturing that the Senate is famous for and really reflect on our priorities, what our priorities should be, what is our greatest blessing, which I believe is our children. Their success is without a doubt the biggest measure of our Nation's success. I encourage my colleagues to do just as I am doing, and that is to talk about the education of our children and move this bill forward.

I yield the remainder of my time.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I compliment my colleague, the Senator from Arkansas, for a great statement on education. That is why I am taking the floor now, to talk about it and to lay out what has happened this year in education funding.

I think my colleague, my friend from Arkansas, has really encapsulated it. There should be no higher priority in our country than the education of our children. I thank my colleague. We will work together on this.

Education should not be a partisan issue. It should be bipartisan; it should have strong support from both parties. However, I am constrained to say at the beginning of this year, the Republican leadership said they were going to make education No. 1, the No. 1 priority. That is what the Senate majority leader said in January. That is what the chairman of the Budget Committee said. I am the ranking member on the appropriations subcommittee for education. When we got our initial allocation, we were then at a cut, in