

JUNETEENTH DAY

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise to recognize Juneteenth Day, a yearly commemoration of the abolition of slavery in our country.

As a nation we value and appreciate the freedom and independence Juneteenth Day represents. Historically, Juneteenth Day has been a celebration of our country's rich African-American heritage and has promoted awareness about the history of African American sacrifice.

A great celebration took place on June 19, 1865, when slavery was finally abolished 2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Fishing, festivals, barbecuing and baseball are just a few of the typical Juneteenth activities people enjoy today. Juneteenth has long been a day of education and enlightenment and often includes guest speakers and prayer services.

I believe that observing Juneteenth Day is necessary to truly embrace the equality and freedom our country represents. We live in a culturally diverse nation and celebrations like Juneteenth Day encourage us to understand and respect the differences that make our country great.

It is imperative that we continue the work of achieving racial and ethnic harmony and I am honored to acknowledge this important day. I commend the tremendous dedication of the people who participate in the annual Juneteenth Day celebrations.

 HEAD START FOR SCHOOL
 READINESS ACT

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. This legislation is a bipartisan effort by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to reauthorize the Head Start Act.

The Head Start Program was established in 1965 as part of the war on poverty by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The purpose of the program was, and remains, to provide educational and other developmental services to children in very low-income families. Since its creation, Head Start has been a comprehensive early childhood development program that provides educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to low-income preschool-aged children and their families. Head Start currently provides services to over 900,000 children and their families through a network of over 1,600 public and private agencies.

The legislation before us today builds on work started last Congress by the HELP Committee under my leadership. The Head Start for School Readiness Act ensures that low-income children receive the educational and developmental services they need to be ready to learn and be successful in school.

I want to thank Senator KENNEDY for his ongoing commitment to working on a bipartisan basis, which has resulted

in legislation that meets the needs of children and families who participate in the Head Start Program throughout our Nation. I would also like to thank our colleagues, Senators ALEXANDER and DODD, for their fine work and dedication to this important program.

Head Start was created to level the playing field for low-income children by providing them with education and development activities. This program recognizes that children do not start school with the same set of experiences and knowledge and helps provide low-income children with some of the experiences and knowledge their more affluent peers have as they start their elementary school experience. The Head Start Program also recognizes the important role that families play in a child's development and encourages their regular participation in the program.

This legislation helps ensure that children in the Head Start Program will be better prepared to enter school with the skills necessary to succeed. It is well documented in early childhood education research that students who are not reading at grade level by the third grade will struggle with reading the rest of their lives. Head Start provides early education for over 900,000 children each year, most of whom would not have the opportunity to attend preschool programs elsewhere. The future of these children is why we have all worked so hard to improve and strengthen this act. The legislation before us today will help Head Start Programs provide children with the early learning skills and early childhood development activities they need to be successful. Head Start introduces many of these children to books, the alphabet, numbers, as well as how to play and share with their classmates. Head Start provides the building blocks children need for success later in life.

The Head Start for School Readiness Act builds on what many great Head Start providers are already doing. Working from recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, this bill adds educational standards related to language skills, literacy and numeracy skills, as well as cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Steps are also taken to ensure that limited English proficient children are provided assistance in acquiring the English language.

I am particularly pleased with the accountability provisions put forth in this legislation. The legislation before us today includes important changes to the Head Start Program related to the evaluation and review of grantees. The timeframe for Head Start grantees to appeal decisions made by the Secretary to terminate grants is now limited. In some instances, Head Start grantees have been found to be operating programs that are unsafe or misusing Federal funds—and are often continuing those bad practices for months—as long as 600 days in some cases—during the termination process. This equates

to children not receiving quality services, and instead of being prepared for success, they fall further behind.

Additional steps have been taken in this legislation to increase the quality of Head Start Programs, including providing the Secretary the authority to terminate a grantee that has multiple and recurring deficiencies that has not made significant and substantial progress toward correcting those deficiencies. This legislation provides greater clarity for grantees as to what constitutes a program deficiency. Many of us have heard from grantees across the country who expressed frustration with the lack of consistency with which the provisions of the Head Start Program is enforced. For that reason this legislation includes provisions related to interrator reliability—this will help ensure consistency in the review of Head Start Programs across the country.

Changes were made to the distribution of grant funds to ensure that programs maintain their funded levels of enrollment. We understand that families served by the Head Start Program tend to be more migratory and that full enrollment at Centers is often difficult to maintain. However, we also know that many programs have waiting lists and that thousands of eligible children are not currently being served. This legislation balances those needs by providing flexibility in meeting full enrollment, but also requiring funds to be moved from chronically under-enrolled programs.

Senator DODD has provided valuable leadership as we worked to develop a clear policy on the roles and responsibilities of the governing bodies and policy councils. We have worked together to clarify and strengthen the roles of the governing body and policy councils while preserving the important role of parents. After careful review, the committee found that many of the important fiscal and legal responsibilities of Head Start grantees were not explicitly assigned.

Unfortunately there have been too many examples of programs that have failed the children, families, and community they were funded to serve due to appalling financial mismanagement. Cases were brought to the committee that detailed excessive and inappropriate expenditures, lost funds, and reduced services to children because proper financial management techniques were not in place. Too often the truth was hidden from governing bodies and policy councils alike.

The bill clarifies those responsibilities leading to more consistent, high-quality fiscal and legal management, which will ensure these programs are serving children in the best possible way. Changes in this legislation address the concerning situations mentioned earlier by placing fiscal responsibility with the governing body. It is absolutely necessary and vital that one entity maintain fiscal and legal control of the Federal grant dollars. That

said, we maintain the equally vital and necessary role of the policy councils in setting program priorities, classroom activities, and personnel changes. We believe this careful balance will help ensure the continued integrity of the Head Start Program for years to come.

We recognize that a vast majority of the Head Start agencies provide high quality, comprehensive services for children in the Head Start Programs. However, the provisions in this bill will create an important incentive for programs to operate at their best and in the best interest of the children they serve.

I want to particularly note emphasis we have placed on the role of parents in Head Start Programs. It is vital to remember that this program provides services to children and their families. Parents provide valuable insight and experience as to what a Head Start Program should do for children. In fact, this legislation increases the presence of parents in Head Start Programs, strengthens services for families, and provides training and development opportunities for parents that do serve on the policy councils and governing bodies.

This legislation also increases the coordination, collaboration, and excellence of early childhood education and care programs. It enhances the role of the State director of Head Start collaboration to ensure that Head Start Programs are maximizing their potential by stretching dollars, promoting partnerships to meet State and local needs, and developing strategic plans to meet future and current goals. This legislation also allows each State to apply for funds to support a State advisory council on early care and education to conduct a statewide needs assessment, identify collaboration opportunities, and support additional data collection. Additional encouragement of coordination and collaboration will stretch Federal, State and local resources to provide additional resources to disadvantaged children across the country.

Finally, this legislation requires the Department of Health and Human Services to cease any further development or implementation of the National Reporting System. While I believe that the assessment of children in the Head Start Program is important, I believe that the assessment must be both age and developmentally appropriate. This legislation requires a review and update of the assessments, standards, and measures used in Head Start Programs by the Panel on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children of the National Academy of Sciences. Once the panel completes its recommendations, the Secretary is then allowed to revisit the issue of assessment in Head Start Programs.

The members of the HELP Committee, and in particular Senators ALEXANDER, KENNEDY, and DODD, have worked tirelessly on this legislation.

The final product before us today is a comprehensive and bipartisan reauthorization of the Head Start Program. I wish to thank Senators KENNEDY, ALEXANDER, and DODD and the other members of the committee for their assistance in moving this legislation to the floor. Passage of this legislation will ensure that low-income children are prepared not only for success in school but for later success in life.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff of members of the HELP Committee who have spent countless hours preparing this legislation for passage by the Senate. In particular I would like to thank Roberto Rodriguez with Senator KENNEDY, Catherine Hildum and Sharon Lewis with Senator DODD, David Cleary and Sarah Rittling with Senator ALEXANDER, and Beth Buehlmann and Lindsay Hunsicker of my staff.

It is my hope that our bipartisan efforts will continue to produce results as we move to final passage of this legislation and on to a conference committee with the House of Representatives. We must all work together to get a bipartisan product to President Bush for his signature as soon as possible.

DYSTONIA

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I take this opportunity to call attention to a very serious, painful neurological disorder, dystonia, that affects many muscle groups simultaneously. We recently commemorated Dystonia Awareness Week and I would like to call further attention to this serious disorder.

Dystonia is a painful disorder characterized by powerful involuntary muscle spasms. The spasms cause twisting, repetitive muscle movements, sustained postural deformities, and debilitating physical ailments. Although most forms of dystonia cause no mental damage, people living with dystonia are often prisoners in their own bodies. Currently, no cure is known and available medical therapies can only superficially address the symptoms.

Approximately 50 percent of people with dystonia have a genetically inherited form whereas birth injury, physical trauma, exposure to certain medications, surgery, or stroke is the cause for the other 50 percent. Dystonia is not selective, occurring in all racial, ethnic, and age groups. It is significantly more common than Huntington's disease, muscular dystrophy, and Lou Gehrig's disease. Given the prevalence and dystonia's impact on so many Americans as well as the limited treatment options available, I am pleased to support the goals of Dystonia Awareness Week. The Dystonia Advocacy Coalition through the commemoration of Dystonia Awareness Week and several other outreach activities seeks to raise awareness of dystonia's impact on the quality of life of 300,000 people in North America.

I call on my colleagues to support increased funding for the National Insti-

tutes of Health to support needed advances in dystonia research. Research is needed to develop reliable tests to diagnose dystonia as well as access to new treatment options to improve the lives of people living with this terrible chronic disease. Until we can find a cure for dystonia, I respectfully ask my colleagues to make a prolonged commitment to the dystonia community that goes well beyond Dystonia Awareness Week.

ROBERT STURM

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to an honest, humble and dedicated servant of the United States Senate who has decided to turn in his Senate badge and enter retirement. For over 33 years, Robert E. Sturm, has selflessly served the Senate in various positions. His humble beginnings can be traced to his first Senate position as a mail clerk for Senator Birch Bayh in 1974. Bob undoubtedly performed his duties in an exemplary fashion, for his Senate career continued in the offices of Senators Dick Clark, Donald Stewart and Russell B. Long. He eventually rose to the respected position of chief clerk of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and has served in that capacity for five current U.S. Senators including Senator PATRICK LEAHY, Senator RICHARD LUGAR, Senator TOM HARKIN, Senator THAD COCHRAN, and myself. After enjoying a 33-year career in the United States Senate, I speak on behalf of all of those who have had the pleasure of serving with Bob when I say; your retirement is well deserved.

I would like to share with you all the uniqueness of Bob's character, kind spirit and devotion to his position as chief clerk. Whether addressing an intern or chairman of a Senate committee, Bob always displayed the same measured approach, graciousness, patience and understanding. Bob never hesitates to place the needs of others before his own. It is commonplace for Bob to spend late nights at work in preparation for farm bill mark ups, accommodate last minute travel requests from impatient Senators and staff alike, fly to the furthest reaches of our great Nation to set up hearings, or answer any procedural question with the temperance of a man who has not answered the question a thousand times before. Robert Sturm is that indispensable part of your staff upon whom you grow so reliant, you wonder how you will function in his absence.

Bob, while a patient and understanding man, is not shy about enforcing the rules of the Senate Agriculture Committee which he loves. Any visitor to a Senate hearing who attempted to open a newspaper during the hearing, spoke too loudly from the audience or attempted to pass out materials not reviewed and approved by Bob, knows how quick the wrath of Bob Sturm can be meted out. Similarly, Bob guarded