

reauthorize Amtrak and make important changes to secure a prosperous future for intercity passenger rail in the United States. In a year when Amtrak faces yet another crisis, in part due to the administration's proposal to severely reduce Amtrak funding in an effort to restructure the railroad through bankruptcy, this bill is all the more necessary. Additionally, congestion delays at our airports and on our roads are making more and more travelers dependent on passenger rail. We need to ensure that our national passenger rail system is adequately prepared to accommodate this increased ridership.

I congratulate Senator LAUTENBERG and Senator LOTT for crafting this important bill, of which I am a cosponsor. This bill encourages the development of new rail corridors, provides incentives for Amtrak to operate more efficiently, and strengthens the relationship between Amtrak and the States in which it operates. This bill will also provide more transparency into Amtrak's operations and help Amtrak better control its costs. I believe that it will further fortify Amtrak as an important, necessary, and viable option in the United States' transportation landscape.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

LABOR-HHS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I am in strong support of the fiscal year 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill. I thank the chairman of the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator HARKIN, and the ranking member, Senator SPECTER, for their leadership in crafting this bill and ensuring some of our Nation's most critical priorities are adequately funded. I am proud that we have been able to negotiate a bipartisan appropriations bill that passed the Senate.

This bill is one of the most important funding bills that comes before us. It fulfills our responsibilities in key priorities, such as health care and education. With the passage of this legislation, we will be striking a significant departure from the administration's damaging trend of shortchanging our children, our schools, our workers, and our health. Instead of undermining education, abdicating our responsibilities on health care, weakening the rights of our workers, this bill will restore a commonsense balance to our values that we should expect from the greatest Nation in the world.

I would like to highlight a few areas in which this bill is especially success-

ful and contrast them to the administration's misguided priorities.

While the President's budget zeroed out funding for mentoring programs under the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act—a program that is critical to keeping our children safe and off the streets—I am proud that this bill not only restores that funding, but increases it by more than \$30 million.

As someone whose dreams of college could not have been realized without Pell grants and other Federal financial aid, I am pleased this bill follows through on the promise to increase Pell grants and restores funding for Perkins loans. These increases will mean that today's young people who come from families that cannot afford college on their own can still achieve their dreams. I know the power of this assistance. Without these programs, I would not have been the first in my family to graduate from college and law school. There are millions of students nationwide who are in the shoes I once was. They are waiting, hoping that there will be adequate financial aid to help them access college. And as tuition continues to increase, as grant aid under this president has shrunk, that challenge is getting anything but easier. In my home state of New Jersey, where the average tuition rose 7 percent since last year, 4-year public colleges are the second most expensive in the Nation. Our students need more, not less, grant aid if they are going to achieve their dreams. This bill sets us in the right direction.

Another program that is vital to students in New Jersey is vocational education. The vocational State grants are critical for the institutions in our state that are working to develop a workforce that is able to compete in today's global economy. New Jersey has some of the best vocational and technical education programs in the country. And while this President continually speaks about an educated and competitive workforce in the science, technology and math fields, he does not put his money where his mouth is. His budget would have cut vocational funding in half. Our bill restores those cuts.

This bill also restores cuts to education technology grants, which the President called for eliminating. These grants help ensure that our children have access to technology in the classroom. New Jersey alone would have lost \$5 million next year under the President's cuts. In the global race to have the most trained, highly skilled, best prepared workforce, we are losing ground. The earlier we can introduce our young people to technology, to help them gain fluency in areas that involve technology, the better off they will be in an evolving and increasing technological world.

I am also pleased this bill increases funding for special education by more than \$500 million. This funding is critical to ensuring children with disabilities have an equal opportunity to receive a good public education, just as other children.

And ensuring all children begin on an equal playing field means adequately funding Head Start, which this bill does. This legislation provides a \$200 million increase for Head Start, which will help improve the school readiness of our young children to ensure they can get the skills necessary to succeed. Head Start provides child development, education, health care, nutrition, and socialization skills, all essential services that benefit more than nearly 1 million low-income children in this country.

This bill also helps our young people by expanding opportunities for them to learn trade skills. It provides a \$15 million increase for YouthBuild, which helps young people learn constructing and housing skills and prepare for post-secondary training. This legislation also provides an increase of almost \$82 million for Job Corps to help strengthen these centers that provide key job skills to young people.

In addition, this bill will help veterans transition to civilian life by providing a \$5 million increase for employment and training services.

In terms of health care, this bill makes significant changes to the President's budget proposal and redefines our priorities as a Nation. Overall, the bill provides \$68.1 billion in discretionary appropriations for Health and Human Services Department programs. This amount is \$5 billion more than last year's level and \$5.4 billion more than the administration's budget request.

The bill provides \$250 million more for Community Health Centers and over \$200 million for the National Center of Minority Health and Health Disparities to address the health care needs of our Nation's minority and underserved communities.

This bill will also provide almost \$29.9 billion in funding for the National Institutes of Health, \$1.3 billion more than the Bush administration's budget request. The Centers for Disease Control would also receive \$6.4 billion under this bill which is \$444 million more than the administration's request. It is imperative that we continue to invest in our Nation's health and research facilities as their work will save and improve the lives of millions of Americans.

I am proud that this bill also provides \$8 million for the initial implementation of the Patient Navigator, Outreach, and Chronic Disease Prevention Act of 2005, which President Bush signed into law in 2005. I sponsored this legislation when I was in the House of Representatives in order to improve health outcomes by helping patients, including patients in underserved communities, to overcome barriers they face in getting early screening and appropriate followup treatment. This funding will help get people in to see a doctor before symptoms develop, so we can catch diseases such as cancer or diabetes early. Then we can get patients in to treatment early, which means