

Testimony of

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before the

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Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

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**“Protecting America’s Competitive Edge Act (S. 2198):
Finding, Training, and Keeping Talented Math & Science Teachers”**

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Dodd, thank you for inviting me to participate in this very important hearing. Strengthening the math and science competencies of our K-12 teachers is critically important. As clearly spelled out in the National Academies report, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm," improving the teaching skills of our math and science educators is of paramount concern to many of us.

I'd also like to thank both of you for your long-standing work on this issue, and for introducing the PACE Act. And I'd like to particularly recognize Senator Bingaman for his leadership on this issue, and for always understanding the importance of a quality education. For nearly 24 years in the U.S. Senate, he has been fighting to ensure a greater federal investment in both K-12 and postsecondary education.

As Secretary of Education for the State of New Mexico, I am proud to say that we have made some significant progress in New Mexico in recent years. New Mexico is now widely recognized as one of the top states in the country for setting rigorous academic content standards, particularly in science and math.

New Mexico is also recognized for its rigorous teacher licensure requirements. Our prospective teachers must pass basic-skills and teacher-competency assessments, as well as subject-knowledge tests to earn their initial licenses. Our veteran teachers must undergo performance assessments to reach a more advanced stage of certification.

As a former principal and superintendent, I can tell you how important strong standards, accountability, and rigorous teacher licensure requirements are.

Our state has a very rich culture, with 43% of the population Hispanic, and nearly 10% Native American. We are also home to two of this country's greatest National Labs, Los Alamos and Sandia National Labs, as well as many high-tech firms and industries. We have a strong and dynamic tradition of great scientific discovery.

But, our state is not without challenges. We rank among the highest in the nation for people living in poverty. Sadly, New Mexico ranks first in the country in rural child poverty. High quality education is the key to changing this statistic. Our capacity is great, but so are our challenges.

While strong standards and rigorous teacher licensure requirements are critical, they just provide the structure within which we can improve educational opportunities. Teachers must truly understand math and science if they are to teach using the rigorous academic standards for math and science that we have established in New Mexico.

We are taking some important steps to do that. We just passed legislation to create a Math and Science Bureau within the NM Public Education Department, as well as making a significant investment for teacher professional development at math and science summer institutes. We also pushed through significant increases to improve access to Advanced Placement programs throughout New Mexico.

But we need to do more. We need to ensure that all of our teachers have the content knowledge, the math and science competencies that are necessary to teach K-12. And we need to keep these teachers in our classrooms. I believe PACE would help New Mexico's efforts in a number of critical ways.

PACE would provide New Mexico with additional tools and resources necessary to ensure that both our current and future teaching workforce have the content knowledge in math and science that our state requires. By providing grants to our universities to develop content-rich math and science education programs, our aspiring teachers will have the content knowledge necessary to effectively teach math and science at all grades, K- 12.

As a former principal, I can tell you, a teacher who is knowledgeable and passionate about the subject she teaches can make all the difference in the world to a student.

And, the scholarship provisions would provide great incentives for New Mexico's students to become math or science teachers because they would cover the entire cost of tuition and other education expenses at every university in New Mexico.

Equally important, PACE provides opportunities for our current teaching workforce to go back to school on a flexible schedule, with tuition reimbursement, and earn a master's degree in math or science education.

Further, I also believe the fellowships for teachers who graduate from these programs will go a long way in making sure our teachers get the pay they so earnestly deserve. These fellowships may just provide new teachers with the compensation they need to stay in the classrooms. Also, the fellowships for the newly-minted master teachers are a great compliment to New Mexico's 3-tier licensure system, which rewards further education and additional responsibilities.

I know education budgets are tight here in Washington, but I believe if these provisions are enacted, and funded, coupled with our efforts at the state level, they very well may provide our students with the teachers they need to make New Mexico the true leader in science and technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.