

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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CHAIRMAN MILLER STATEMENT ON IMPROVING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a joint hearing of the House and Senate education committees: “Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization: Improving No Child Left Behind to Close the Achievement Gap.”*

The joint hearing of the House and Senate on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will come to order.

I am delighted to be joined by so many of my distinguished colleagues from both sides of the aisle and from both sides of Capitol Hill. In particular, I want to recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. McKeon, the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Education and Labor. I also would like to extend a special welcome to my good friend and Co-Chairman of this historic bicameral hearing, Senator Edward Kennedy from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and Senator Isakson from Georgia, who will serve today as the Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Committee. Senator Enzi is unable to be with us today, and expresses his regrets, because he is delivering a eulogy at a funeral back in his home state of Wyoming. Each of these Members will present an opening statement, and without objection all other members may submit an opening statement for the record.

When the Supreme Court said in its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision over 50 years ago that segregated schools cannot be equal, it affirmed the right of every child to an education on equal terms.

But despite that decision, and although many children have received a first-rate education, many others have not. Far too many children still do not have the educational opportunities that they deserve.

Instead, we have seen a persistent academic achievement gap and a persistent graduation gap. Our nation has become too complacent about both.

For far too long these problems were relegated to the back burner here in Washington, despite the harm to our children and our country. That was a national disgrace.

The No Child Left Behind law brought these gaps to the forefront again, and most supporters and opponents of the law will agree that we must make closing these gaps a national priority. That is the point of No Child Left Behind.

At its essence, the law boils down to a very simple goal: making sure all children across the country can read and do math and science at grade level, so they can have the brightest possible future.

No child should be denied the same chance as another because of low expectations, systemic neglect, inadequate resources, or a failure of vision about what we can do to move all children forward. In fact, closing these gaps is the least we should expect in our wealthy and powerful nation.

It is not too much to ask if we are to have any hope of retaining our nation's position of global leadership and our moral credibility.

While it is critical that we remain faithful to the goals of No Child Left Behind, it is equally important that – five years after its enactment – we seek out new and better ideas for how best to achieve those goals.

This hearing is the formal beginning of what will be a bipartisan, comprehensive, and inclusive process to change and improve the No Child Left Behind law. We will hear a broad range of opinions on which provisions of the law are working well and which are not in our schools and for our children.

There will be some disagreement, both today and in the coming months. By listening to each other and hearing a broad range of views and concerns, Congress will be better able to help address these concerns when we begin re-writing the law later this year.

Discussion about No Child Left Behind has been heated, but it has been healthy – and much-needed. After all, these were the most sweeping education reforms since the 1960s when the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed as part of the War on Poverty.

I am confident that the discussion that formally begins today will lead us, in the end, to enact legislation that will be responsive to the legitimate concerns that have been raised about the law and its implementation.

We have a lot of ground to cover – from how we best promote and measure student progress to how we attract the highest quality teachers and principals into every school. These and other topics will be the subjects of future hearings.

I believe I speak for all Members of the committee in thanking our witnesses and the coalitions and organizations they represent for all the extraordinary time, thought, and care that has gone into your recommendations. Your expertise will be enormously helpful today and as we move forward with the reauthorization process in the months to come.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that I come to this process with an open mind. I am eager to hear from – and work together with – both supporters and critics of the law.

There is no question that we need to improve the law and properly fund it. But the bottom line is that we cannot afford to return to the status quo that existed before No Child Left Behind.

We must remain dedicated to the principle that every child deserves a first-rate education – because we know that every child, if given the opportunity, *can* learn and *can* succeed.

Helping our nation’s children and families is what this committee is all about, and I look forward to working with all of you as we intensify our efforts on their behalf.

Thank you.

I now yield to the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Education and Labor, Mr. McKeon, for his opening statement.

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