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**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY AT THE NOMINATION
HEARING FOR SECRETARY OF EDUCATION- DESIGNATE ARNE DUNCAN**

(As Entered into the Record)

I commend Arne Duncan for his nomination to be Secretary of Education and welcome him to our committee today.

Mr. Duncan brings inspiration, dedication, and ability to the field of education and I look forward to learning more about his vision for improving and strengthening all aspects of education, from early education and preschool to America's institutions of higher learning. As the superintendent of one of the nation's largest and most diverse school districts, he has displayed a remarkable ability to bring people together both to make steady gains in Chicago's schools and to focus on the needs of disadvantaged children.

The Secretary of Education is one of the most important positions in our government. More than ever, in today's global economy, our schools and colleges are the gateway to the American dream. The Department has an indispensable role in helping to bring that dream within the reach of every American. By selecting such an outstanding leader and educator as his Education Secretary, President-elect Obama has signaled strengthened American education is a high priority for his Administration. And I support Arne Duncan's nomination enthusiastically.

To fulfill our goals in education, we need to make progress on several fronts:

- There's broad consensus that what we do for our children in the earliest years profoundly affects the rest of their lives. Investments in early education and care are well worth it. It's time to guarantee high-quality early education programs for every child.
- On elementary and secondary education, strengthening and modernizing our public schools is one of our greatest challenges. We must do all we can to help every student achieve, by providing additional time for learning during the school day, renewing our commitment to the teaching profession, connecting schools to their communities in better ways, and pursuing innovative strategies to intervene and assist our at-risk students.
- We must also do more to expand opportunities in higher education. The dream of college should be available to any student with the talent, desire, and commitment to pursue it. It's ridiculous in this day and age to allow a dollar sign to bar the door to college for anyone, or open it only at the price of massive student debt.

In taking these steps, we can't let our current economic troubles delay or distract us. If anything, the present crisis should spur us to do more in education to safeguard our future.

A strong and open-minded Secretary is critical to improving American education, and from what he has accomplished in Chicago, I'm confident that Arne fits the bill. He's championed pragmatic solutions to persistent problems and, as a result, he's lasted far longer than most urban superintendents.

For young children he has supported proven initiatives. He's overseen the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs. He's supported groundbreaking Child-Parent Centers, which have helped over 100,000 children.

He's launched a bold, turnaround strategy for his city's most struggling schools, working to bring the new leadership and better teachers needed to transform schools and improve student outcomes. By partnering with an innovative teacher-residency program, he's put the talents of career changers to work for the public good.

These reforms are paying dividends. Since he took over in 2001, fewer students are dropping out and three times more are taking Advanced Placement classes. The college rate for high school graduates is up, and achievement gaps are smaller.

I know that Arne Duncan will bring this same can-do attitude to federal policymaking on education. He'll work with all states to improve standards and set high expectations for all students.

He understands that in exchange for promoting high standards, the federal government must keep its end of the bargain. Public schools need and deserve a partner in the Department of Education, and a more effective roadmap for implementing reforms.

The new Administration and this new Congress have an opportunity to write a better chapter in American education. It's imperative that we undertake a major effort to improve our schools, and move quickly to address the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps that increasingly endanger our nation's future.

We must stay the course on the twin hallmarks of standards-based reform – accountability and high expectations for all students. But we must also pursue better innovations, wiser investments, and solutions that match the scope of the changes required.

Our effort begins with teachers, the driving force behind public education. We need to find new ways to draw talented and accomplished individuals into teaching and encourage them to serve in the neediest schools. We also need new ways to compensate teachers for their successes, and greater opportunities for them to develop and become leaders in their schools.

We also need to establish new and better ways to provide all students with the rigorous education they need to prepare for college and the 21st Century economy. We need a more effective approach to the testing and use of data – to judge schools more fairly, but also to better diagnose the learning needs of students and the teaching strategies to address them.

We need a national strategy to implement real solutions for the schools falling short of the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.

We need to re-think the existing school schedule and re-design the school day to see that today's struggling schools become successful learning institutions. And we need new strategies for involving parents and communities in schools, in order to provide the support and services students need to be successful in their learning.

We must also face up to the challenge of reforming America's middle and high schools. Students need greater opportunities to take advanced courses and enroll in early college high schools, to get a jumpstart on their future. A high priority must be to reduce the alarming dropout rate, which is now an almost unbelievable 7,000 students per day. To help students who have already dropped out, we must invest in alternative pathways that encourage them to re-enroll in school and earn their high school diploma.

Schools are America's first and greatest democratic institution and we need to give higher priority to the civic mission of education. We can help students improve their understanding of government, history and social studies. An early investment in service learning here can instill a deeper appreciation of the important role that young people can have in their communities and our country.

Most of all, we must work together to make sure that resources and reforms go hand in hand. It's essential for Congress and the Administration to work together to see that our federal education reforms are implemented wisely.

I look forward to working closely with Mr. Duncan to meet each of these challenges. I'm confident that he will make an outstanding Secretary, and that, at this all-important moment in our nation's history, he will help to create a brighter future for all the nation's students.

Questions for Secretary of Education-Designate Arne Duncan

- 1) A college degree is more important than ever to obtain a good job, but the rising cost of college is keeping more and more qualified students out. According to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, financial barriers will prevent 3.2 million college-qualified high school graduates from obtaining a bachelor's degree in this decade alone.

The Pell grant is the backbone of the student aid system for low-income students, but unfortunately, the maximum grant has not kept up with rising college costs. The average cost of attending a 4-year public in-state college is now \$14,300, while the maximum Pell grant is just \$4,731. The economic downturn is clearly exacerbating the education challenge for low-income students and their families. President-Elect Obama has made clear his intent to increase the maximum Pell grant, which is an excellent first step. If confirmed, what other steps would you take or work on with Congress to increase college affordability for low-income students?

- 2) The ongoing credit crisis has created new challenges for the bank-based Federal Family Educational Loan Program, which relies on private capital and private lenders to make federally-guaranteed loans to students. Congress has legislated short-term solutions to protect students' access to loans for the current and next school year, but a long-term solution is needed to ensure that students are not left without adequate financial assistance during future economic downturns.

The Direct Loan Program has always been cheaper than the FFEL Program for taxpayers, and the credit crisis has highlighted another advantage – because the program relies on safe Treasury capital, it is not undermined by the struggling credit market. As a result, many colleges across the country have signed up for the Direct Loan Program in the past year, to ensure that their students will have access to the loans they need through this crisis. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure the Department of Education has the capacity to make loans to all students through the Direct Loan Program?

- 3) As Chief Executive Officer at Chicago Public Schools, you've had firsthand experience with the challenges that many school districts are facing in the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act.

I know you appreciate the importance of maintaining meaningful standards and accountability to ensure that all students have the opportunity to master a rigorous curriculum. What more should the federal government do to help schools close their troubling achievement gaps, while also encouraging the development of high standards for all students?

- 4) The President-Elect has laid out a series of comprehensive education reform plans that seek to improve educational opportunities from birth through adulthood – from expanding early childhood education to retaining effective teachers in high-need schools to increasing college affordability and improving adult education. If confirmed, how do you plan to work with Congress to prioritize and implement these reforms?

- 5) There are programs administered by other federal agencies that also address and support education from the early stages of development through workforce training. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services administers Head Start and Child Care, both of which affect the abilities and skills of low-income children. The Workforce Investment Act, administered by the Department of Labor, supports job training programs. Learn and Serve America, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, supports important service-learning opportunities for youth.

Each of these programs could potentially benefit from closer collaboration with officials at the U.S. Department of Education. How can the Department of Education maximize the benefit of these programs to the populations they serve through closer interagency coordination and collaboration? As Secretary, how would you propose to work with these other agencies to maximize the quality and effectiveness of these programs?

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