

than 10 years, even though the regulation states they have to be closed out within 20 months. It shows the ineptness of this bureaucracy. It shows the incompetence of this bureaucracy, the inability of this bureaucracy to manage taxpayers' money in an effective way, to perform functions in an effective and efficient way. It is shocking. It is shocking to have the inspector general come along and find that there are thousands of contracts that have been completed for years—some over 10 years—and they are still open. The cost of that is \$25 billion. Even worse, the system that CMS has in place to monitor the contracts hasn't been accessible to the bureau within HHS responsible for closing the contracts. It is just a complicated mess.

Once again, we have situations totaling about \$25 billion that could either be used for more necessary functions, returned to the taxpayer or not taken from the taxpayer in the first place. The bottom line is that these have been identified and action needs to be taken.

This Senator continues to add to an ever-growing amount of waste, fraud, and abuse totaling, since we have started, a grand total approaching \$156 billion.

Having exposed this, the first thing we ought to be doing before we begin talking about raising taxes, before talking about a program staying in place or not staying in place is going after the waste, fraud, and abuse and stopping this outrageous waste of money that is occurring.

The next time we are back in session, I will be back down here with more. They just keep pouring in. We keep finding these documents, finding this and that. It is unbelievable that we have put ourselves in this situation and the ineffectiveness is out of control. It is no wonder the public no longer trusts us. If we can't get to this, how can we ever get to the reforms necessary to stop us from becoming insolvent?

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last summer, by a vote of 81 to 17, the Senate passed a bill to fix No Child Left Behind. The House of Representatives had already passed their version. We had a conference report. We sent it to the President, and it was in December that President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Acts to fix No Child Left Behind. The President not

only signed it in a large ceremony attended by parents, teachers, students, Governors, and people from all walks of life, the President said it was a "Christmas miracle." I think he said that for a couple of reasons. One, it was good news. Miracles are usually good news, and this was good news for 50 million children, 3.5 million teachers, and 100,000 public schools. They had waited 8 years for the U.S. Congress to fix the problems with No Child Left Behind. They knew it was difficult to do, and they looked forward to the result that we achieved because we achieved a consensus. There surely was a consensus if this was a law that everybody wanted fixed, but we also had a consensus about how to fix it.

People who don't usually agree in the education world said: We want to keep the tests. We want to keep the 17 federally required, State-designed tests between grades 3 and 12 so we can know how our children are doing, and we want to report that to the parents and the students, but we want to move the responsibility for our children and our schools out of Washington and back to the classroom teachers, back to the local school boards, back to the communities, and back to the Governors.

We heard that from the left, and we heard that from the right. We heard that from the Governors, and we heard that from the teachers unions. Because we all had that consensus, we were able to secure a vote of 81 to 17 here, and, as I often said last year, that is not that easy to do. Everyone is an expert on education. We have all had some education. It is like being in the Louisiana State University football stadium or the University of Tennessee football stadium. The stands are filled with 80,000 or 100,000 people who know exactly what the next play to call is because they have all played a little football and they are usually ready to say what it is. So that is what we had to navigate, but we did. As the President said, it was a Christmas miracle and a gift for the children, the teachers, and the parents who care about our public schools.

The reason I am on the floor today is to put into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD a letter to the Acting Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, John B. King, Jr. The letter is from a number of those in the coalition of educators and others who helped to pass the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the letter I am referring to at the conclusion of my remarks.

This is a letter from people who don't always work together. In fact, in their letter to the Acting Secretary of Education they say: "Mr. KING, although our organizations do not always agree, we are unified in our belief that ESSA is a historic opportunity to make a world-class 21st century education system. We are dedicated to working together at the national level to facilitate partnership among our members

in States and districts to guarantee the success of this new law."

This letter comes from the National Governors Association, the School Superintendents Association, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers who all signed this letter. So did the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Parent Teacher Association. I have racked my brain, and I can't think of any significant group in the State or local education world that hasn't signed this letter, except the Council of Chief State School Officers. I have no idea why they have not yet signed it because they were enthusiastically in support of our bill as well, so I hope they are also part of our coalition.

But here is the importance of this coalition. The coalition that sent this letter is the same coalition that supported passage of the bill. They know what I know and what Senator MURRAY of Washington State knows—who was the principal Democratic architect of the bill—that bill isn't worth the paper it is printed on unless it is implemented properly.

This bill makes a dramatic shift in policy for elementary and secondary education. The Wall Street Journal called it the largest devolution of power from Washington to the States in a quarter of a century. They are right about that. Both the left and the right had grown tired of a national school board in Washington, in effect, telling teachers and school boards and Governors and legislators what to do about their children and what to do about their schools. Those decisions are best made by those closest to the children. We don't get any wiser by flying from Nashville to Washington each week. In fact, there are a lot of people back in Nashville who think we lose a little bit of our common sense when we come here. So this is important. This is what we usually don't see from Washington—taking large amounts of power and sending it back home where it belongs. That is what all of these organizations say about the new law. Their letter says:

ESSA replaces a top-down accountability and testing regime with an inclusive system based on collaborative State and local innovation. For this vision to become a reality, we must work together to closely honor congressional intent. ESSA is clear: Education decision-making now rests with states and districts, and the federal role is to support and inform those decisions.

Let me read that again:

Education decision-making now rests with states and districts, and the federal role is to support and inform those decisions.

That is what the Governors say. That is what the National Education Association says. That is what the American Federation of Teachers says. That

is what the superintendents, the legislators, the State boards of education, the school boards, the principals, and the PTA say. And that is what the Senate said, that we are moving power out of Washington and back to the classroom, back to the community, back to the State. Our next year is going to be devoted to making sure that gets done. Our committee—of which the distinguished Senator from Louisiana is a member—will be having six hearings this year with the Department of Education and with many of the people whom I just mentioned to make sure the law is being implemented in the way Congress wrote it. The House of Representatives will do the same thing. Our objectives will be the same that are in this letter—working together to ensure a timely, fair transition to the new law; coordinate with Governors, State representatives, et cetera; promote State and local decision-making—in other words, make sure that what happens is what Congress said should happen.

I thank the National Governors Association especially, which took the lead in organizing this coalition. I thank each member of the coalition for organizing this coalition. I will be visiting with the Governors in a week, and I will be suggesting to the Governors—after I thank them for their support for the bill—that every single State organize a coalition just like the coalition represented in this letter.

In Tennessee, I think it would be a good idea if the Governor and the superintendent work together with the NEA, the AFT, the legislators, the State board of education, the school boards, the principals, and the PTA to make sure that in Tennessee, the responsibility for the children, the schools, the standards, and the progress is in the hands of those in whom we decided it ought to be vested. And we, at our level in Congress, will keep the spotlight on what is happening here.

There was not a piece of legislation more important that passed in the Congress last year. We got a lot of good things done in the last year, but nothing was more important than this, nothing was more difficult than this.

I have already mentioned Senator MURRAY, the Senator from Washington State, who was superb in working with both sides of the aisle to help get a result that had evaded the Senate for 8 years. I welcome the support of this coalition for the very same work we will be doing in the Senate. I hope every State will follow the example of these national organizations.

I look forward to a period of innovation and excellence that I am sure will be the result of this new era of accountability, responsibility, and opportunity placed in the hands of those who should have the responsibility for our children and our schools.

I thank the president, and I yield the floor.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

FEBRUARY 10, 2016.

JOHN B. KING, JR.,
Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.

DEAR ACTING SECRETARY KING: On behalf of states, school districts, educators and parents, we write to express our strong, shared commitment to making the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) a law that puts students first. We invite you to work with us to ensure that communities determine the best methods of educating our nation's children.

Although our organizations do not always agree, we are unified in our belief that ESSA is a historic opportunity to make a world-class 21 century education system. We are dedicated to working together at the national level to facilitate partnership among our members in states and districts to guarantee the success of this new law.

ESSA replaces a top-down accountability and testing regime with an inclusive system based on collaborative state and local innovation. For this vision to become a reality, we must work together to closely honor congressional intent. ESSA is clear: Education decision making now rests with states and districts, and the federal role is to support and inform those decisions.

In the coming months, our coalition—the State and Local ESSA Implementation Network—will: Work together to ensure a timely, fair transition to ESSA; Coordinate ESSA implementation by governors, state superintendents, school boards, state legislators, local superintendents, educators and parents; Promote state, local and school decision-making during implementation; and Collaborate with a broader group of education stakeholders to provide guidance to the federal government on key implementation issues.

In ESSA, Congress recognizes states and schools as well-suited to provide a high-quality education to every child, regardless of their background. We have long prioritized lifting up those students who need help the most and our members stand ready to continue this work.

Our organizations look forward to a cooperative, collaborative and productive relationship with you and your staff throughout the implementation process.

Sincerely,

Scott D. Pattison, Executive Director/
CEO, National Governors Association;
William T. Pound, Executive Director,
National Conference of State Legislatures;
Kristen J. Amundson, Executive
Director, National Association of State
Boards of Education; Daniel A.
Domenech, Executive Director, AASA:
The School Superintendents Association;
JoAnn D. Bartoletti, Executive
Director, National Association of Secondary
School Principals; Lily
Eskelsen Garcia, President, National
Education Association; Thomas J.
Gentzel, Executive Director, National
School Boards Association; Gail
Connelly, Executive Director, National
Association of Elementary School
Principals; Randi Weingarten, President,
American Federation of Teachers;
Laura M. Bay, President, National
PTA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

COMMENDING STAFF ON TRADE POLICY LEGISLATION

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes to thank our staff

who did so much to address what I call the need for a fresh trade policy, for trade done right through the course of this year. Our staff and Senator HATCH's staff have put an enormous amount of sweat equity into this process. I would like to thank some of these terrific and dedicated individuals here this afternoon so that all of the Senate will get a sense of what they did.

Over the course of the last year and a half, with the support of Chairman HATCH, we were able to successfully conclude negotiations to introduce four major trade bills: the trade promotion authority legislation; the trade adjustment assistance legislation; the bill that passed overwhelmingly today, the Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act; and the trade preference program renewal and enhancement program. These staff leaders helped manage those bills in the Finance Committee, on the Senate floor, completed conference committee negotiations, and along the way, they did some awfully good work in terms of assembling a bipartisan coalition for this legislation.

In my view, the last year has arguably been the most productive in terms of trade policy in decades. In my view, these accomplishments are going to make an enormous difference for American workers, American innovators, and our country's ability to compete in these tough global markets, and the stakes are just enormous. There are going to be 1 billion middle-class people in the developing world in 2025. Frankly, they are just crazy about America's goods and services. They like so much what we make, grow, and produce—whether it is airplanes, transportation equipment or our wonderful wine and cheese, our fruit, bicycles. The list just goes on and on.

I am going to be home this weekend for townhall meetings in rural Oregon. I often say that one out of five jobs in Oregon depends on international trade. Trade jobs often pay better than do nontrade jobs. If anybody is interested in a modern economic theory, I say we ought to do more to grow things here, to make things here, to add value to them here, and then ship them somewhere. With those trade-related jobs paying better, that ought to be a strategy that would win bipartisan support.

This work doesn't happen by osmosis. It happens because we have a terrific team of people behind these efforts. I would like to recognize the members of that team who have done so much to make this year successful.

Greta Peisch is our counsel. She put together the Customs components of the trade enforcement package. Her patience and her ability to work with staff, with industry, with all kinds of organizations—leaders representing workers, consumers—Greta Peisch creatively worked to try to address all concerns as responsibly as possible and what an impressive job Ms. Peisch has done.

Elissa Alben has done an extraordinary job in influencing the shape of