

Kennedy and Judd Gregg went to their respective caucuses and demanded action. And as a result, the bill came to the Senate floor, passed overwhelmingly, and I had the honor of signing it this morning.

I wish you could have seen the piece of legislation. It's really tall. And I admit, I haven't read it yet. [Laughter] You'll be happy to hear I don't intend to. [Laughter] But I know the principles behind the bill, and I want to describe some of them to you.

First, this bill says that we will hold people accountable for results. It says, in return for receiving Federal money, States must design accountability systems to measure—to determine whether or not children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. In return for Federal money, the State of Massachusetts or the State of Texas or any other State in the Union must develop an accountability system to let us know whether children in grades three through eight are meeting standards. It basically says, every child can learn. And if they're not learning, we want to know early, before it is too late.

Now, I've heard them say, "Well, tests—we're testing too much." If you don't like to take a test, too bad, because we need to know. We need to know whether you're learning.

I read a quote from a little girl from New York the other day that touched my heart, and I hope it touches yours. She said, "I don't remember taking exams. They just kept passing me along. I ended up dropping out in the seventh grade. I basically felt no one cared." Well, she was—she's blowing the whistle on what happens in some of our schools in America.

You see, sometimes it's easy to walk into a classroom and say, "Certain children can't learn. Therefore, let's just move them through. Let's don't test them. Let's just push them out at the end." And that's wrong in America. Every child matters; every child should be diagnosed on whether or not they can read and write and add

and subtract. And if they can't, we need to correct their problems early, before it's too late. The cornerstone of reform is strong accountability measures, just like you do here in the State of Massachusetts.

Secondly, in order for reform to mean anything, there must be consequences. Something must happen if there's failure. Now in this bill, it says schools will be given time to correct. After posting the test scores and mailing out the report cards that show mediocrity or failure, schools will still be given a chance to correct the problems. And therefore, we provide incentives and resources to make sure that failing schools have got the opportunity to meet standards.

But if they don't, the consequence is that parents must be empowered to make different choices. We must not trap children in schools that will not teach and will not change. And so, therefore, this bill says parents in failed schools can send their children to another public school or charter school or be able to get tutoring for their children in either the public or private sector. It is important to free families from failure in public education, and that's what this bill does.

The third principle—it says that we trust the local people to make the right decisions for the schools. It says we trust the Governors and the school boards to design the path to excellence for every child. It says Washington has a role of providing money, and now Washington is demanding results. But Washington should not micromanage the process. And so, this bill provides a lot more flexibility for the local folks. In essence, it says the people of Boston care more about the children of Boston than people in Washington, DC.

Rod Paige understands that. The reason I picked Rod to become the Secretary of Education is because he was the superintendent of schools in the Houston Independent School District. He knows what it means to run a school district. And when we implement this bill, I can assure you, Rod is going to make sure that the spirit