



Press Office: (202) 226-0853
Wednesday, June 19, 2013

Rep. George Miller (D-CA) Opening Statement for the Markup of H.R. 5

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the ranking member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, for the committee markup of H.R. 5.

Mr. Chairman, before us this morning is a repeat of last Congress – an ideological bill that severely weakens our nation’s commitment to civil rights in education. The only thing that has changed within the last year with this legislation is the bill number.

Let me be clear: The country needs a rewrite of No Child Left Behind. But by taking this ideological route once again, Republicans ensure that this broken law will remain in place.

This committee has spent years laying the groundwork for reauthorization. We brought in the best ideas being practiced on the ground. We learned that, while No Child Left Behind was a major step forward, the law needed a rewrite.

We learned that there is broad consensus in the education community that we should continue demanding high standards for all students. Unfortunately, all of this groundwork seems to be for naught because the bill before the committee takes us far out of the mainstream.

This bill would let states lower standards, sending an unambiguous signal that college and career readiness is not a national priority. This bill doesn’t count something as fundamental as graduation rates as part of accountability systems. This bill lets schools teach students with disabilities to different, lower standards.

And this bill doubles down on the Ryan Republican budget by gutting education funding on top of cuts from sequestration, which have already taken billions away from needy schools.

This bill is a step in the wrong direction. Stakeholders from across the education community agree. This includes business and labor, civil rights organizations, disability rights advocates and nearly every other education group.

They have raised deep concerns that this bill does not rise to the challenges facing our children, our schools, and our nation.

For instance, the National Center for Learning Disabilities says that this bill would “dramatically alter the academic landscape for students with disabilities, jeopardizing their ability to graduate from high school, go to college and obtain employment.”

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights believes that the merit of an education bill is determined by its treatment of the most disadvantaged among us. Yet the “Student Success Act” proposes to marginalize underserved communities by completely removing the federal focus on the achievement of underprivileged students.

I agree with these and many other voices expressing deep concern with the Republican bill.

While this bill proposes to move us backwards, the rest of the country is struggling to move forward. We see this in the waiver process of No Child Left Behind. I understand that waivers offered by the Obama administration are not without controversy. They have been an imperfect tool made necessary by Congressional inaction.

But these waivers have shown how ready some states are to move education forward.

Over the last two years, these 36 states plus the District of Columbia have been implementing higher standards, better assessments, and improved accountability and evaluation systems. This is welcome news for the children in these states.

And we in Congress should be embracing this drive towards high standards and ensuring that all children in all states can take advantage of these improved education systems. Democrats will offer just one amendment that will attempt to fix the flaws of this ideological bill and show a path forward for rewriting ESEA.

The Democratic amendment will:

- Support college and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments;
- Support a state-driven accountability and school improvement system that rewards success and focuses intense energy to improve struggling schools;
- Ensure students with disabilities remain in the accountability system and aren’t held to lower standards as they are in the Republican bill;
- Restore individual programs for English Learners, migrant students, Indian students, and rural students;
- Promote policies that improve the effectiveness, working conditions, and professional development and support for our nation’s teachers and principals; and
- Provide dedicated resources so that students are safe, healthy, and well-rounded.

The Republican bill does not even come close to meeting these basic tests. No one thinks that a rewrite of ESEA should be as rigid as NCLB. However, it is not enough to claim greater flexibility and transparency if the underlying bill's standards and assessments are meaningless and don't lead to significant change.

We should be concerned about whether our children are being held back by a system that isn't held accountable for supporting their potential. We should be concerned about whether children are being given a fair chance at a future of their choice.

This fight is about equity.

This is about every child in our country getting the education they deserve – regardless of poverty, disability, or other challenges. That is what we must all focus on in this Congress. A high-quality education is one of the most important guarantees we can give our children.

I urge my colleagues to reject this bill and instead support the Democratic alternative, a comprehensive approach to reauthorization that puts children over ideology.

<http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov>