

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7012

December 14, 2009

Nevada State Education Association
3511 E. Harmon Ave.
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

Dear Friends:

I want to thank the thousands of Nevada educators and support professionals that recently joined me for a “tele-townhall”. I appreciated the invitation to join Nevada State Education Association President Lynn Warne to address the membership of the NSEA about a number of issues important to Nevada’s educators and support professionals. I was not able to answer all of the questions raised on the call, so I wanted to follow up to address several important issues.

This is a challenging time in our state, and many members questions reflected the difficult task they are facing. During this economic crisis, Nevada’s schools have been hit particularly hard. State budget cuts over the past few years have made a challenging situation even more difficult. This is one reason why I worked hard to include funding for K-12 and higher education in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* that was passed earlier this year. As many of you know, the recovery legislation included nearly \$500 million in flexible funding for Nevada’s schools, colleges and universities to help prevent teacher layoffs, increased class sizes, and the loss of essential services during this economic downturn. In fact, a recent report estimated that the recovery legislation has thus far saved the jobs of several thousand educators across Nevada.

Many participants also raised concerns about the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Over the past few years, I have met with teachers, administrators, and parents across the state to discuss reauthorization. Also, as many of you know, over the last few months, Education Secretary Duncan has visited over 30 states to hear from parents, teachers, students, and administrators across the county about specific areas in need of improvement. One of his visits was to Las Vegas in August where he and I met with teachers, support professionals, parents, and students to discuss concerns with the current law. We have both heard about the need to make the law less punitive, to incorporate the growth model, to find ways to recognize all levels of progress, and to include multiple measures to determine student achievement, not just fill-in-the-bubble tests. I am hopeful that once we are able to complete health care legislation, committees in the House and Senate will begin the process of holding hearings and completing a reauthorization draft.

Many Nevada educators shared their interest in legislation to address the Social Security Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). In the past, I have cosponsored legislation to repeal both provisions, and I continue to be concerned about this issue, especially given the large number of Nevadans who are affected. Legislation was reintroduced this Congress that seeks to repeal the GPO, which prohibits a spouse, widow, or widower of a government employee from receiving full Social Security spousal benefits and a government pension and the WEP, which reduces the Social Security benefits of workers who also have pension benefits from employment not covered by Social Security. I assured NSEA

members that I will do everything possible to ensure that all Nevadans' Social Security benefits are not unfairly reduced.

Countless NSEA members also expressed their support for the health care legislation currently being debated on the Senate floor. I appreciate the strong backing of the NSEA in the fight for health care reform. I am working with the labor community to address the excise tax on health care plans and pass a plan that will not negatively affect working families. I will also continue to fight to maintain a strong public option in the final bill. This bill will be good for all middle class families in Nevada. It will lower health care costs and guarantee coverage for countless Americans regardless of any pre-existing conditions. I am hopeful that we will be able to complete legislation in the coming weeks to send to the president for his signature.

Another issue that we discussed was the need for more state support for public education. I am disappointed that Nevada ranks near the bottom in terms of per pupil spending. One often overlooked consequence of Nevada's relatively low level of support is the impact that it has on federal education funding. Both Title I and IDEA funding formulas factor in state expenditures in order to incentivize states to properly fund K-12 education. While Nevada and other low-funding states are not punished by these formulas, other states that provide more for their schools, teachers, and students benefit. I have and will continue to work to direct other federal resources to our state. As an example, over the last four years, I have secured over \$20 million in funding for technology, afterschool programs, expanded math and science curriculum, charter schools, dropout prevention programs, and other important needs in our K-12 schools.

Finally, many NSEA members expressed some concern with Education Secretary Duncan's \$4 billion *Race to the Top* fund. I am committed to finding a way to move forward that works for Nevada's teachers and still allows the state to be eligible to apply for up to \$175 million in federal funds. I have urged Governor Gibbons to call a special session of the state legislature to address Nevada's eligibility and ensure that the opportunity to compete for millions in federal funds will not be lost.

Again, thank you for your participation in the "tele-townhall" and for sharing your thoughts with me. I am grateful for the hard work that Nevada's educators and support professionals do each day to provide every child in Nevada with a quality education.

My best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harry Reid". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "H".

HARRY REID
United States Senator
Nevada