

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 27, 2005

CONTACT: Laura Capps/Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

SENATOR KENNEDY'S PLAN TO RAISE STANDARDS IN AMERICAN HISTORY PASSES THE SENATE

Washington, D.C. – Today, Senators Kennedy's amendment to address the underachievement of American students in history passed in the Senate as part of the Labor-H Appropriations bill.

Senators Kennedy and Alexander offered this bill, acknowledging that students still consistently score lower on American history than on any other course. The American History Achievement Act would encourage states to make progress on their U.S. history standards, elevate the standing of American history in curriculum, and promote better teaching of the subject in classrooms.

"Instilling appreciation of America's past – teaching the values of liberty, justice, equality, and civic responsibility – should be an important mission of every school," Senator Kennedy said.

"Thanks to the efforts of large numbers of teachers of history and civics in classrooms throughout America, we're making progress. But much more remains to be done to advance their understanding of the subject. We need high standards for civic education, more opportunities for internships and service-learning, and stronger partnerships between schools and community organizations to involve young people more fully in the life of their communities."

Specifically, the bill would create a new 10-state pilot assessment of U.S. History and Civics, administered in grades 8 and 12, through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It would also provide for a more frequent national analysis of learning in American history, by assigning priority to the U.S. history NAEP at the national level.

Below is further information about the bill:

ALEXANDER-KENNEDY NAEP AMENDMENT

Summary: Adds \$7 million to the Underlying Bill to Implement S. 860, the American History Achievement Act (Alexander-Kennedy). S. 860 proposes to authorize the National Assessment Governing Board to conduct a ten state pilot study of the NAEP test in American History and Civics, in grades 8 and 12.

The strength of our democracy depends on ensuring that children have a basic understanding of the nation's past and of civic engagement. America's past encompasses great leaders and great ideas that contributed to our heritage and to the principles of freedom, equality, justice, and opportunity for all. Today's students will be better citizens in the future if they learn more about that history and about the skills needed to participate in our democracy.

We must do more to improve teaching and learning in American History and Civics. A recent study by Dr. Sheldon Stern – the Chief Historian Emeritus at my brother’s Presidential Library – reveals that 22 states have standards in American history that are either weak or lack clear chronology, appropriate political and historical context, or sufficient information about real events and people. As many as 9 states still have no standards at all for American history. Good standards matter. They’re the foundation for teaching and learning in every school.

With the right resources, time, and attention, it’s possible to develop good standards in every state. Massachusetts began to work on this effort in 2000, through a joint review of history standards that involved teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, and university professors. After monthly meetings and three years of development and revision, the state released a new framework for teaching history in 2003. Today, our standards in American history and World history receive the highest marks

This amendment would strengthen the teaching of American history and civics, and raise the standing of these subjects in school curriculum. It proposes a leap forward through a new state-level pilot assessment of American History and Civics under NAEP. The assessment would be conducted on an experimental basis in 10 states, in grades 8 and 12. The National Assessment Governing Board would ensure that states with model standards, as well as those that are still under development, participate in this assessment.

###