

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 23, 2007

CONTACT: Melissa Wagoner
Kennedy (202) 224-2633
Jude McCartin Bingaman (202) 224-1804

KENNEDY, BINGAMAN, & BURR INTRODUCE HIGH SCHOOL REFORM MEASURE

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Richard Burr (R-NC) and Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) today introduced comprehensive legislation aimed at dramatically improving America's public high schools and high school graduation rates.

The Graduation Promise Act (GPA) would reform the nation's "dropout factories" -- high schools where a high percentage of students never graduate. It would for the first time set aside \$2.5 billion each year for the purpose reforming of our nation's high schools.

Forty years ago, the United States was No. 1 in the world in high school graduation rates. Today, we rank 17th. About one-third of the students who enter 9th grade will not graduate from high school in four years, if at all.

The statistics are worse for minority students and students from low income families. Only about 55 percent of African American students and 52 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time, compared to 78 percent of white students. And students from low-income families drop out of school at a rate six times higher than their more affluent peers.

"We cannot afford to let the estimated 2,000 failing high schools in our country continue to push students off the path to prosperity. Collectively, these schools serve approximately 2.4 million students. We must ensure the continued prosperity of our country by promising each high school student a chance to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue their dreams and succeed. The Graduation Promise Act will help make that possible," Bingaman said.

"The Graduation Promise Act will make great strides in helping high school students achieve their fullest potential by bringing our schools into the 21st century. The bill will help local schools, states and the federal government to work together to modernize the practices and models that are being used in our schools to ensure the success of all our students," Kennedy said.

Specifically, GPA authorizes a \$2.4 billion High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund to support states in their efforts to turn around high schools with low graduation rates. Funding would be used by states to create the

framework for identifying low-performing high schools and directing resources and technical assistance to them.

GPA also authorizes \$60 million in competitive grants for the development and implementation of successful models geared toward students who are struggling in conventional education settings. And it authorizes \$40 million in competitive grants to states for identify statewide barriers holding students back from graduating, and creating new policies that improve graduation rates.

GPA will be discussed Tuesday at a Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee hearing that Kennedy will chair.