Senator John Warner's comments on the *No Child Left Behind Act*
Conference Report, December 18, 2001

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1, the No Child Left Behind Act, which will reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA.

Last year, presidential candidate George W. Bush appropriately indicated that education reform was a top priority. This year, President Bush has worked to make this top priority a reality. The Senate will soon pass H.R. 1, legislation which is based on President Bush's education blueprint, entitled, ``No Child Left Behind .'" I share the President's goal; our educational system must leave no child behind.

I commend President Bush, Secretary of Education Paige, and my colleagues who served with me on the Education Conference Committee. We have worked in bipartisan fashion to forge this legislation that will substantively reform elementary and secondary education in this country.

Education is the key to a better quality of life for all Americans. From early childhood through adult life, educational resources must be provided and supported through partnerships with individuals, parents, communities, and local government. The Federal Government has a limited but important role in assisting states and local authorities with the ever-increasing burdens of education.

Originally passed in 1965, the ESEA provides authority for most federal programs for elementary and secondary education. ESEA programs currently receive about $18 billion in federal funding, which amounts to an estimated 7 cents out of every dollar that is spent on education.

Nearly half of ESEA funds are used on behalf of children from low-income families under title I. Since 1965, the federal government has spent more than $120 billion on Title I.

Despite the conscientious efforts of federal, state, and local entities over many years, our education system continues to lag behind other comparable nations. Nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests. Fourth grade math students in high poverty schools remain two grade levels behind their peers in other schools. Our high school seniors score lower than students in most industrialized nations on international math tests. And, approximately one-third of college freshman must take a remedial course before they are able to even begin college level courses.

The underlying issue is--do we just pour more taxpayer dollars to perpetuate these mediocre results or do we take some bold new initiatives?

The No Child Left Behind Act takes some bold new initiatives by increasing federal education funding, increasing state and local flexibility in their use of Federal funds, and increasing accountability--each are steps in the right direction.

First, in regard to funding, the No Child Left Behind Act authorizes $26.5 billion for elementary and secondary education. This includes a substantial increase for Title I programs--which are education programs directed toward disadvantaged children. The bill also provides substantial funding for programs aimed at having all children read by the 3rd grade, teacher quality programs, and programs aimed at making our schools safe and drug free.

Next, in regard to flexibility, the bill significantly increases State and local flexibility in the use of their Federal education dollars.

Under the ESEA law that exists today, most ESEA programs have a specified purpose and a target
population. Our states and localities are given little, if any flexibility in the use of the federal dollars they receive.

Our schools do not need a targeted one size fits all Washington, D.C. approach to education. While schools in some parts of the country may need to use federal education dollars to hire additional teachers to reduce classroom size, schools in other parts of the country may wish to use federal dollars for a more pressing need, like new text books. Federally targeted programs for a specified purpose do not recognize that different states and localities have different needs.

Who is in a better position to recognize these local needs, Senators and Representatives in Washington, D.C. or Governors, localities, and parents? Those Virginians serving in state and local government and serving on local school boards throughout the Commonwealth are certainly in a better position than members of Congress from other states to determine how best to spend education dollars in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The No Child Left Behind Act increases flexibility and local control. For example, the bill allows every local school district in America to make spending decisions with up to 50 percent of the non-title I funds they receive from the federal government. Thus, with regard to non-title I funds, every local school district will have the freedom to choose alternative uses for these funds within certain broad guidelines.

Moreover, the bill provides even more flexibility in the use of federal education dollars for up to 7 states and 150 school districts. These states and local school districts will be given the opportunity to consolidate a number of federal education programs, providing the participating states and localities the ability to focus federal dollars where they are needed most.

Finally, accountability, in certain areas, is needed. Our education policy is locking out many students and not providing them the key to a better life. It's time to move forward in education to ensure that all of our children are given the opportunity to receive a higher quality of education.

President Bush's proposal to test students annually in grades 3-8 in reading and math, which is part of the No Child Left Behind Act, is a strong proposal that promotes accountability.

These tests will result in parents and teachers receiving the information they need to know to determine how well their children and students are doing in school and to determine how well the school is educating its students. Testing also provides educators the information they need to help them better learn what works, improve their skills, and increase teacher effectiveness.

While some have expressed concern that this legislation calls for too much testing, I have a different view. A yearly standard test in reading and math will allow our educators to catch any problems in reading and math at the earliest possible moment. Tests are becoming a vital part of life, no matter how onerous. If America is to survive in the rapidly emerging global economy, tests are a key part.

I note that Virginia has already recognized the importance of testing, having installed an accountability system called the Standards of Learning (SOLs). In Virginia, we already test our students in math and science in grades 3, 5, and 8. The No Child Left Behind Act will build upon Virginia's experience.

Increased funding, increased flexibility, and enhanced accountability, are all steps in the right direction that we take with the No Child Left Behind Act. However, I must remind my colleagues that we have more work to accomplish.

President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" blueprint calls for tax relief for America's teachers when
they dip into their own pocket to purchase supplies for students. Senator Collins and I have worked together since early this year to pass legislation to provide teachers with this type of tax relief. Unfortunately, the bill before us today does not contain these provisions.

In my view, as we leave no child behind, we must not forget our nation's teachers.

The important role that our nation's teachers play in educating today's youth and tomorrow's leaders cannot be overstated. Quality, caring teachers along with quality, caring parents, play the predominant roles in ensuring that no child is left behind.

Nevertheless, in part because of their low salaries and the numerous out-of-pocket expenses they incur as part of their profession, we are in the midst of a national teaching shortage. Teacher tax relief legislation is one way the federal government can help.

So, while I look forward to voting in support of the No Child Left Behind Act and look forward to President Bush signing this important education reform legislation into law, I also look forward to working with the President and my colleagues in Congress to ensure that our teachers receive the tax relief they deserve.