

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON (R-CA)**  
**SENIOR REPUBLICAN, EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**  
**MARKUP OF THE "IMPROVING HEAD START ACT OF 2007"**  
**MARCH 14, 2007**

Thank you Chairman Miller and thank you to our Committee colleagues for being here today to consider this important legislation. Let me start by commending my friends, Mr. Kildee and Mr. Castle, for their work on this bill, which I am so pleased they were able to introduce with a bipartisan slate of co-sponsors.

We may be dealing with a couple issues today that define some differences between the two parties. For example, the Majority's decision to expand Head Start eligibility to those who the program was not designed to serve originally causes me some concern. Ultimately, I believe this policy change may have the impact of leaving many children who live in poverty underserved by Head Start programs. This runs contrary to what we all believe to be the mission of this program and will do nothing to strengthen Head Start services. If anything, it will weaken them.

However, in spite of whatever differences we may demonstrate today, I believe we all can agree on this: Head Start

is a good program that can be made much better. At its core, I believe this legislation before us moves us in that direction, and I'll be pleased to support it today.

While the resources to fund Head Start are significant, more work is needed to achieve the ultimate program goal of closing the readiness gap between Head Start children and their more advantaged peers as they enter kindergarten. Some studies indicate that children enrolled in Head Start do make some progress, but at the same time, we need to understand that we still have some work ahead of us in closing the readiness gap.

With this in mind, the bill before us today will strengthen Head Start's academic standards by emphasizing cognitive development and the results of scientifically-based research in topics critical to children's school readiness. The measure also aims to improve teacher quality by ensuring a greater number of Head Start teachers have degrees and are adequately trained in early childhood development, particularly in teaching the fundamentals. That's great news for those children who will be participating in Head Start programs years down the road.

I also have been disappointed that – in recent years – we have heard many stories that have marred Head Start’s good name. In various communities, we’ve found that financial abuse within some Head Start centers is far too commonplace. And in fact, a March 2005 report from the Government Accountability Office warned the financial control system in the Head Start program is flawed and failing to prevent multi-million dollar financial abuses that cheat poor children, taxpayers, and law-abiding Head Start operators.

In the 109th Congress, Republicans led the House in passing a Head Start reauthorization bill that addressed these weaknesses in the Head Start financial control system, and I believe the bill before us moves in that direction as well. It would require Head Start operators to meet a range of financial disclosure requirements as a condition of receiving and keeping their federal Head Start grants. Furthermore, under this bill, grantees will have to be overseen by a local governance board that provides direction and actively oversees program activities. These are positive steps to ensure abuses are minimized and taxpayer funds – and the children those funds are meant to serve – are protected.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for scheduling a vote on this measure early-on in the 110th Congress to demonstrate what a priority this is for our Committee. And again, I thank Mr. Kildee and Mr. Castle for their leadership on this issue, as well as the staff on both sides of the aisle for their hard work in getting this bill to where it is today.

I'd especially like to thank Stephanie Milburn, one of our Committee Republican policy staff members. She took the lead on this bill and has led the charge on so many other important issues, from job training to welfare reform, during her time on the Committee staff. Stephanie recently accepted a position with Republican Leader Boehner, and we wish her all the best. She will be missed, and we thank her for the time she spent with us here on this Committee. And with that, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this reauthorization measure.

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