IN IOWA'S INTEREST

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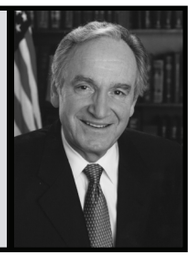
United States Senator



Investing in Iowa's Teachers and Nurses

As the father of two daughters, I know that watching your child graduate from college is one of a parent's proudest moments. Yet too often, Iowa's college graduates walk away from campus with their diploma in one hand and a sizable student loan bill in the other.

The average college graduate leaves college with nearly $17,000 of student loan debt. That often forces many college graduates to pass up a rewarding, but underpaid, career in teaching or nursing. These facts contribute to Iowa's critical shortage of nurses and teachers.

Helping students reduce their education debts is a good investment in education, health care, and Iowa's future. It's a common sense proposal that's focused on Iowa and America's future.

By 2010, America will face a shortage of 725,000 nurses. By 2020, that shortage will increase to 1.2 million as the baby boomers begin to retire and need more care.

It's much the same case for teachers. We'll need 2.2 million teachers nationwide just to replace the teachers that retire or leave the profession. In Iowa, 40% of our teachers will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years.

A shortage of teachers means too many of Iowa's children will learn in overcrowded classrooms, reducing the amount of one-on-one time teachers spend with students and making it more difficult for teachers to maintain discipline. The nursing shortage limits Iowans' access to health care and leaves patients stuck in the waiting room. It also means our teachers and our nurses are overwhelmed and burned out, leading many to leave the profession, worsening the crisis.

I recently met Raye Taylor, a junior at my alma mater, Iowa State. Raye comes from a background much like my own. She and her parents work hard, but like a lot of Iowans, they simply cannot afford the cost of higher education.

Raye hasn't let that stand in her way. She works three jobs while carrying a course load of 17 credits. Yet even with all that hard work she's already accumulated $20,000 of student loan debt.

While there are no miracle cures, we must begin to stem the crisis. For too many of our young people who would like to enter teaching or nursing, the prospect of a large student loan debt burden is a barrier.

I've proposed an education plan to help lift the college debt burden so students can take on the challenge of teaching or nursing. By agreeing to serve for five years in Iowa communities that face shortages of nurses or teachers, graduates would be eligible for up to $17,500 of student loan forgiveness.

The need for this plan is clear.

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