

Statement of
The Honorable Tommy Thompson
Commission on No Child Left Behind
May 9, 2006

Good morning, I am pleased to commence the second of five public hearings this Commission will undertake over the next few months to learn about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on our schools and children. First, let me thank our distinguished panel of witnesses as well as those in the audience who have taken the time to join us for this important discussion today.

My name is Tommy Thompson, and I co-chair this Commission along with my colleague Roy Barnes. Governor Barnes and I, along with our distinguished fellow commissioners – who will briefly introduce themselves in a few minutes – have agreed to serve on this Commission because we believe that the historic passage of No Child Left Behind – with strong bi-partisan support – has significantly changed the national conversation about how we improve public education in this country. NCLB has brought a stronger focus on accountability for results, a commitment to assuring that all children – regardless of race or economic status – achieve at a high level. NCLB also gives parents increased options for their child’s education through public school choice and free tutoring provided to those stuck in schools that are slow to improve.

In that same bi-partisan spirit, the objective of the Commission is to conduct an independent analysis of what is working well and what needs to be improved in No Child Left Behind. Our work will culminate in a report, that will be released to the public, with recommendations to Congress and the Administration on how the law can be made more effective and better support the work of teachers, principals and other school leaders in improving student learning and closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

This hearing and others to follow, along with visits to schools to talk with teachers and principals will inform our recommendations and our efforts to learn more about the impact of the law. Our first public hearing, held last month at Cal Poly Pomona, focused on the impact No Child Left Behind has had on improving teacher quality and assuring that all children have the opportunity to be taught by highly qualified teachers. You can access a report on those proceedings by visiting our website at www.nclbcommission.org.

Today’s hearing will focus on the impact of NCLB’s requirements for annual assessments in reading and math in grades three through eight and in grade ten. The law also requires states to begin testing in science at least once every three years. These requirements build on the testing provisions of the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – the precursor to No Child Left Behind.

Witnesses at today’s hearing will also discuss the importance of providing useful and timely information on school performance to the public – education’s consumers – as

well as to administrators making decisions about accountability measures for schools who have not met State standards. In addition, administrators and parents need timely and accurate information on school performance to make decisions on interventions such as public school choice and free tutoring provided to students.

Let me stress that this Commission is currently in the information gathering stage of our work. We don't yet have recommendations or hardened viewpoints on what is and what is not working in No Child Left Behind.

Along with today's witnesses and those who have signed up with Commission staff to speak for two minutes during our public comment period at the end the hearing, we encourage all of you and all of those tuning in to our national webcast and those watching on CSPAN to let us know your thoughts and concerns regarding No Child Left Behind. We have set up our website to allow individual members of the public to submit written comments on the law and its implementation directly to the Commission. We want to know what you think and we urge you to take advantage of this opportunity. Again, the address for communicating with the Commission is www.nclbcommission.org.

I would now, like to introduce my colleague, Governor Roy Barnes to make some opening remarks...