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BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4325

STATEMENT OF REP. KENNETH E. BENTSEN, JR.
BEFORE THE SENATE HEALTH,
EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE
SENATE CONFIRMATION
DR. ROD PAIGE, SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
JANUARY 10, 2001

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Jeffords and members of the Committee, I am honored to offer introductory remarks on behalf of my constituent and friend, Dr. Rod Paige, the Superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, and the President-Elect's nominee to serve as the Secretary of Education. I know of no finer man, no better educator, no more qualified individual than Dr. Paige to bring an agenda of leadership and innovation to the United States Department of Education. He will do a superb job for our nation, just as he has done an excellent job for the students of the Houston Independent School District ("HISD").

Dr. Paige has a varied and impressive professional background. He earned his bachelor's degree from Jackson State University and a master's and doctorate in physical education from Indiana University. He first served as a coach, then athletic director and later as a dean at Texas Southern University. He was elected to the HISD Board of Trustees in 1989, and served with distinction until 1994, when he was selected by his colleagues to serve as superintendent.

As trustee and superintendent, Dr. Paige has worked to make the HISD school system - the largest in Texas and seventh-largest in the nation - one of the country's finest urban school districts. As superintendent, Dr. Paige has presided over a district with approximately 209,000 students and 31,000 employees. Under his tenure, academic performance and test scores have showed marked improvement. By 1998, more than 80 percent of HISD's high school students were passing the state's writing exam, an increase of 15 percentage points in five years. By comparison; in 1992, fewer than 45 percent of Houston public high-school students passed the math test. By 1998, almost 70 percent scored passing grades. And during the 2000 school year, the number of HISD schools receiving Exemplary status from the Texas Education Agency ("TEA") doubled from 10 to 20, and the number of schools receiving Recognized Status from the TEA rose from 63 to 107.

As superintendent, Dr. Paige also emphasized giving individual schools more decision making authority, while demanding increased accountability. Dr. Paige advocated inter-agency cooperation when addressing issues such as gang violence and parental neglect, and has given schools and teachers greater flexibility to establish their own curricula, security programs and other campus-based policies. Under Dr. Paige, schools received more flexibility in how they spend money, and privatized many noneducational functions, such as building maintenance and food service. To make the district's administrative operations more efficient, Dr. Paige

established a business advisory group that led the district in a \$678 million project to build 10 new schools.

With the assistance of a reform-minded Board of Trustees, Dr. Paige has put together coalitions of teachers, administrators, parents, taxpayers and business leaders to make Houston ISD a model for urban school reform. He understands that true education reform has to occur at the local level with the active involvement of parents and educators. As Dr. Paige has said, if educators and parents work together, every child can thrive. When we set high standards and provide schools and children with the support they need, then hold them accountable for results, public schools can provide a first class education to all students, regardless of economic background.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that Dr. Paige will bring a strong sense of innovation and leadership to the Department of Education; qualities similar to those he successfully implemented in Houston. He has proven that strong leadership, commitment and vision can make a demonstrable difference in the lives of students, and I encourage members of the Committee and the Senate to strongly support his confirmation.
