Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC)
Republican Leader, Committee on Education and Labor
Full Committee Hearing on "Underpaid Teachers and Crumbling Schools: How Underfunding Public Education Shortchanges America's Students."
Tuesday, February 12, 2019

Teachers work hard on behalf of American students and families, and they deserve paychecks that reflect their tireless efforts. And all students deserve access to safe, clean, and healthy school facilities, regardless of zip code. To dispute these two facts would make anyone out of touch with reality.

Over the past year, there's been a steady stream of well-publicized strikes across the country. Teachers unions in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, Los Angeles, and most recently Denver, all called attention to these matters.

So, given the recent uptick in teachers union strikes, a reasonable person would assume that state and local governments are cutting budgets and disinvesting in public schools. Quite the contrary. In fact, most states have actually increased public school spending. But instead of increasing salaries, improving structures and investing in classroom equipment, many school districts have ended up pouring taxpayer funds into administrative bloat that leaves students and teachers high and dry.

It's been said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. When it comes to these two issues— teacher pay and school construction—Democrats have not had a new idea in decades. Any time a challenge arises, Democrats look to refill the same prescription of more money, more bureaucracy, and more power punted to distant figures in Washington.

Is the answer more control from Washington? Well, having just emerged from a government shutdown, I think most Americans would agree that the less politicians can control and leverage, the better.

Teachers and students deserve more than the same tired fights over money. We need to find new and innovative approaches to public school success.

Republicans still, and will always believe, that the best solutions for serving children emerge from the communities in which they live and grow. I've been fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve my community as a member of the local school board. So I know firsthand how complicated it can be trying to make resources, regardless of whether they're local or federal resources, coming from taxpayers, actually serve students in a way they can recognize. That's why we need to engage thoughtfully and hopefully in new initiatives to make education a central focus in community development.

Community development can come in all shapes and sizes, and one of the most interesting new concepts to emerge has been "Opportunity Zones." Opportunity Zones are areas of the country that look very much like the community in which I was raised and which I proudly represent today. These are communities where the poverty rate exceeds 30 percent and local industry has struggled to rebound from the 2008 recession. Opportunity Zones, which are home to over 50 million Americans, will spur private industry to make long-term investments in these communities.

This bipartisan community development initiative was initially championed by Senators Tim Scott and Cory Booker, and in 2017 was signed into law by President Trump as a provision of the Republican *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*. The provisions in this law have the potential to unleash trillions of dollars in private capital for long-term investments in impoverished parts of the country.

Time will tell if Opportunity Zones and other new initiatives will finally help us solve the problems of low teacher pay and poor school facilities. But time has already told us that higher price tags, and more bureaucracy in Washington, don't deliver higher results. Today, we are going to be listening for fresh ideas and signs of innovation as we pursue our shared goal of better environments for students and teachers.

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