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Contact: Kate Cyrul (Harkin) 202-224-3254
David Ward (Burr) 202-228-1616
Michael Briggs (Sanders) 202-228-6492
Julie Edwards (Merkley) 202-224-8841

SENATORS INTRODUCE MEASURE ENSURING SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), Richard Burr (R-NC), Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) today introduced a measure that seeks to increase the safety of children going to school by foot or bike by constructing new sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways, and crossings, traffic signals and launching Safe Routes to School education, promotion and law enforcement campaigns.

“These efforts are making it safer for children to walk and bicycle to and from schools in all 50 states,” **said Harkin**. “I see this as a win-win: improved safety, increased physical activity to help communities address childhood obesity and at the same time, reduced traffic congestion and increased air quality. School districts are cutting bus service and children need safe routes to their school.”

“The Safe Routes to Schools Program encourages communities to build safe walking and biking routes for children to get to school and increase their physical activity,” **said Burr**. “This program not only promotes activity and helps ensure children are able to get to school safely, it does so under the framework of the Highway Trust Fund. In North Carolina, this program is building safe routes across the state, and I’m confident the program will do just as much good across the country.”

“This bill will keep children safe and active,” **Sanders said**. “It will protect students, help the environment around schools, increase transportation options, and save energy.”

“We need to do everything we can to make sure our kids are safe when they walk or ride their bikes to and from school,” **said Merkley**. “This legislation will not only improve the public safety for our children, it will also encourage healthier lifestyles and reduce harmful air pollution.”

First created as part of the SAFETEA-LU transportation bill in 2005, the Safe Routes to School program is providing over \$600 million from 2005 through this year to State Departments of Transportation. With this funding, elementary and middle schools and communities throughout the country are constructing new sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways, and crossings, and launching Safe Routes to School education, promotion and law enforcement campaigns. The Safe Routes to School program is due for reauthorization as part of the next transportation bill.

The legislation introduced today seeks to expand and strengthen the program in several ways:

- Increase funding to \$600 million per year to meet the high demand and need for the program;
- Expand eligibility to include high schools and to allow a state to spend a portion of its funds to address bus stop safety and improved access in more rural communities;
- Improve project delivery and reduce overhead by addressing regulatory burdens; and
- Add a research and evaluation component.

The Safe Routes to School program has proven successes. [*Many Steps . . . One Tomorrow*](#), produced by the National Center for Safe Routes to School, examines the first three years of implementation of the program and includes a map showing the location of the more than 4500 schools that have received federal SRTS grants thus far. In addition, the [*Safe Routes to School 2009 Policy Report: Moving to the Future and Building on Early Achievements*](#), written by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, identifies ways in which the program could be strengthened to help even more children and communities be healthy, safe and green.

The bill is supported by a number of organizations including AARP, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, National Parent Teacher Association, Safe Routes to School National Partnership, YMCA of the USA and many others.

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