

## **100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION**

**Sen. Tom Carper**  
**May 15, 2008**

Mr. President, I want to say a few words on the 100th anniversary of the National Governors Association.

I especially want to thank my friend and colleague Senator Durbin for yielding to me to speak first this evening.

It was 100 years ago today that the first meeting of our Nation's Governors took place. In recognition of the National Governors Association's Centennial today, I, along with a number of my colleagues, including Senator Voinovich of Ohio and Senator Alexander of Tennessee, have submitted a resolution commemorating the 100th anniversary of the National Governors Association.

It is my hope we will be able to clear this resolution honoring the 100th anniversary this evening. As former Governors currently serving in the Senate, Senators Bayh, Bond, Gregg, and Ben Nelson will also be joining myself and Senator Alexander, along with Senator Rockefeller, in sponsoring this resolution.

If you think about it, that is all of the former Governors who now serve in the Senate and who were at one time members of the National Governors Association. I was privileged to serve, along with Senators Voinovich and Alexander, as chairman of the National Governors Association at one time.

It is a special privilege for me to take a moment to reflect on the organization's growth and its accomplishments over the last 100 years. On May 15, 1908, 100 years ago today, President Teddy Roosevelt hosted the first meeting of our Nation's Governors at the White House. They gathered to discuss conserving America's natural resources.

Now, 100 years later, the Federal Government is still working with our Nation's Governors in an ongoing effort to protect America's natural resources through conservation provisions such as the farm bill that we adopted here today or addressing climate change or protecting our air through legislation such as the Clean Air Planning Act.

Today, 100 years later, the National Governors Association serves as the collective voice of our Nation's Governors and remains one of Washington, DC's most respected public policy organizations.

Through this bipartisan organization, Governors are able to identify and discuss a broad range of issues relating to public policy and to governance. I have long said the 50 States are laboratories of democracy, and we should use them as such, and we do.

Today we do that. From the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters, initiatives and policy recommendations that have come from the Governors often serve as catalysts for change both in the States and at the national level.

I was Governor of Delaware back in 1995 when Congress was actively debating how to reform a failing Federal welfare program, trying to decide how do we make work pay more than welfare. Without solutions coming from the Congress, the States had already begun taking reform efforts into their own hands. Over half the States, including my own State of Delaware, and I believe the State of Vermont, had made significant changes to their own welfare programs by seeking waivers from the Federal rules.

Many of the welfare policies and practices tested by States were ultimately adopted by the Federal Government in the sweeping 1996 welfare reform legislation passed by the Congress and signed by President Clinton, which the Governors helped to write.

As with welfare reform, the National Governors Association has played and continues to play a key role in developing national policies ranging from transportation to education, to environmental protection and health care, to name a few.

In the 1950s, President Eisenhower enlisted the Governors' help to help build our very first interstate highway system. The State-Federal partnership forever changed the face of transportation in America and underscored how critical States' participation has been to realizing national goals.

The same is true of Medicaid and the SCHIP program, the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The same is true of the implementation of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, and as we fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the National Guard units of all 50 States.

Over the past century, the National Governors Association has played a key role in shaping public policy and addressing America's most pressing challenges. On behalf of each of the former Governors who are privileged to serve today here in the Senate, it is my honor to acknowledge the leadership of Governors both past and present, to celebrate what they have achieved over the last 100 years by working together, and to look toward with anticipation of what lies ahead for our Nation's National Governors Association and for the Governors who will help to lead it in this century and beyond.

If I could just add a footnote, I always think of the States as laboratories of democracy. We can test policies or programs to see if they work at the State level, and if they do, maybe see if they would work on a national level.

One of the things I especially liked about being part of the National Governors Association was that every even-numbered year, right after the election in mid-November, the National Governors Association would host a school for new Governors and spouses. For 3 days, a different Governor would host in his or her State the NGA's school for new Governors and spouses. The students were the newly elected Governors

who had been elected 2 weeks earlier. They were Democrats and Republicans, in some cases an Independent. The faculty were the current Governors and their spouses. We would spend 3 days together. Usually, it was as many as 20 Governors and spouses on faculty.

We would spend those 3 days together in different places around the country--no press, very little staff. The idea was for the grizzled veterans to really bare our souls to the new guys and gals, incoming Governors, and tell them the mistakes we made and to say to them: Learn from our mistakes. Don't make the same ones we did, whether it is putting together your team, developing your communications plan, working with the legislature, deciding where you are going to live and trying to be a chief executive and still be a good parent, a good spouse. But during those 3 days we spent together, a remarkable bonding occurred between the old Governors, the veterans, and the new Governors, and across party lines. I am convinced one of the reasons why the Nation's Governors tend to be less partisan is what happens in new Governor school.

Among my closest friends are Governor Mark Racicot, former Governor of Montana, who later went on to be national committee chair and general campaign manager for President Bush's reelection; Mike Leavitt, former Governor of Utah, who succeeded me as chair and who serves today as a Cabinet secretary in this administration. What we have tried to do in the Senate, those of us who used to be Governors who serve here today but went through new Governors school, is take that idea and transplant it here. I call it Senators school. It is really orientation.

This fall, in November, 2 weeks after the election, we will have new Senators, newly elected Senators, their spouses will come. They will spend 3 days together; some sessions with spouses, others not with spouses. The faculty will be current Senators and our spouses. We will have 3 days to get to know each other, to try to teach the new guys and gals the ropes and to begin to develop new personal relationships that really are needed here to make this place work. I look forward to being a part of doing that this November. But the idea was one of those ideas that came from the National Governors Association.

Again, the NGA and the States are laboratories of democracy. Taking that lesson and applying it here on the national level will have good effect.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 568 submitted earlier today by yours truly.