



April 24, 2001

Senator Gregg Outlines Republican Education Priorities

Yesterday on the Senate floor as the Senate began preparations to take up S. 1, the education reform bill, HELP Committee member Judd Gregg (R-NH) outlined Republican education priorities. The following remarks are (slightly edited) excerpts from the unofficial transcript.

I think it's important to note as we address the issue of education that the federal role in education is narrow. Most elementary and secondary education issues are addressed at the local level.

Approximately 93 percent of the funding for elementary and secondary school education comes from the local school districts or the states. So the federal role in education, elementary and secondary school education, is really quite narrow and it's focused on two basic themes: one is making sure that special education programs are funded; and, two is making sure that children who come from low-income families have an equal opportunity to succeed.

The bill that's going to come to the floor later this week includes the largest federal education program designed to address the needs of kids who come from lower-income families. This program was begun about 35 years ago. It's called Title I, and it helps kids with lower incomes try to get the same education as their peers. We have spent \$120 billion on this program. . . and, in fact, the vast majority of that spending has occurred since 1990. What have been the results?

The results have been that the educational achievement of low-income kids has actually gone down and at best has remained stagnant. In fact, the average fourth grader today who comes from a low-income family reads at two grade levels less than his or her peer in that same classroom. And the graduation rate, the dropout rate, and the level of academic ability of kids from low-income families in each grade level have been falling back.

So we've left a lot of children behind even though we've spent \$120 billion. And I think what we have proved unalterably is that money can't solve the problem. Because if it could solve the problem, we could have at least seen a marginal improvement in the academic achievement of these kids. Instead, we've seen no improvement for all intents and purposes.

President Bush came into office saying that he was going to change this. And he has put forward a series of proposals to fundamentally adjust the federal role as we pursue the education of low-

income kids, and to try to improve it. He has four basic themes. First, we're going to change the federal role so that we don't focus on the bureaucracy . . . but rather we focus on the child.

The money today does not flow to the child. The money flows to the school system and the bureaucracy. So the President has said, let's look at the child and make our programs child-centered.

The second thing that's been said by this administration and by those of us on this side of the aisle is to give the local school districts — the parents, the teachers and the principals — flexibility when they get federal funds.

We have attached innumerable strings to the dollars we have sent out to help these low-income children get better educated. The amount of bureaucracy we have built up behind the federal dollars has been absolutely staggering — to the point where some states spend almost two-thirds of their bureaucratic time complying with federal regulations which represent 7 percent of their actual spending. And as a result, we have created a bureaucratic maze of disproportionate complexity.

What the President has said is let's cut those strings. Let's send the money back to the local school districts. Let's acknowledge the fact that parents, teachers and principals have as much, if not more, involvement and knowledge of how to educate the child in their school system as we do here. Let's give them a little credibility for being concerned about their kids.

The third proposal is this, however: That in exchange for this new flexibility, we're going to ask for one thing — that the children learn. . . . Instead of controlling the way the money goes in and how it's spent, we're simply going to say you can take the money, but in exchange, you've got to make sure these kids learn.

And the fourth item is that we're going to have accountability so that we can be assured that there's academic achievement. We're going to say different ethnic groups, different racial groups, different income groups — you're going to have to explain whether or not those kids are learning along with the whole group in the classroom.

We're not going to tell them what to know. We're not going to tell them what the test should be, what the standard should be. But we are going to say after you set those standards, we're going to expect all the kids in that classroom to achieve at the level that meets that standard.

And so that is the system that is being proposed — four new concepts which merge together to hopefully create a system where no child will be left behind, that is child-centered, that is flexible, in which there is academic achievement, and there is accountability.

We have stepped into this issue. We have spent \$120 billion of American taxpayers' hard-earned income and we have produced very weak results. It's time for a change. It's time to recognize that we need to take a different approach to addressing the area of helping the low-income child not to be left behind.

