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To: Jeffrey A. Shesol/WHO/EOP@EOP, Andy Rotherham/OPD/EOP@EOP, Stephanie A. Cutter/WHO/EOP@EOP, Karin Kullman/OPD/EOP@EOP

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Subject: GOP Delivers Knockout to Clinton School Aid

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Richard L. Siewert  
03/09/2000 12:15:15 PM

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To: Loretta M. Ucelli/WHO/EOP@EOP, Stephanie A. Cutter/WHO/EOP@EOP

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Subject: GOP Delivers Knockout to Clinton School Aid

a good fight. this may stir up interest in esea rad. address.

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From: Julia M. Payne on 03/09/2000 11:51:14 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Richard L. Siewert/WHO/EOP@EOP, Joel Johnson/WHO/EOP@EOP

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Subject: GOP Delivers Knockout to Clinton School Aid

GOP Delivers Knockout to Clinton School Aid

By David Hess  
National Journal News Service

WASHINGTON (March 8, 2000) - Education committee Republicans dealt staggering blows to President Clinton's major school initiatives Wednesday, voting to reject his plan to hire 100,000 new teachers and help finance the renovation of rundown local school buildings.

As the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee continued its contentious markup of a bill to renew the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act, GOP members of the sharply divided panel plowed under Clinton's initiatives while adopting a Republican-backed plan that would expand a low-income student's ability to switch to a better school.

Committee Democrats, led by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., vowed to reprise the debate over Clinton's proposals in the Senate when the bill reaches the floor, probably in early April. But the panel's votes demonstrated tight unity among conservative and moderate Republicans, who seem convinced that school assistance programs need a stem-to-stern overhaul, and the prospect of overturning the committee's judgment on the Senate floor appears remote now.

That could lead in the end to a presidential veto of the GOP legislation -- and a tough fight this fall when Clinton and congressional leaders huddle to work out spending levels for education programs. The president generally has prevailed in previous negotiations over the size and shape of his initiatives.

Wednesday's session marked the second day this week that Republicans determinedly set about to make sweeping changes in the way that billions of dollars in federal aid is spent by states and local schools.

Spearheaded by Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., a former governor, GOP members of the panel have adopted ESEA amendments that would empower states to use the federal money with few restrictions, other than prescribing broad directions to improve the scholastic performance of low-income and minority students.

The vast bulk of nearly \$20 billion in the ESEA bill allocated for fiscal 2001 would go to states and to local schools in the form of block grants consolidating major programs that up to now have been financed separately and targeted to achieve specific purposes. Under the Republicans' approach, state governors would have wide sway to spend the money as they deemed appropriate to set learning standards for students and to demand that educators meet them.

In the opening salvo Wednesday, the committee approved, by a party-line 9-8 vote [Vote 1], Gregg's amendment permitting low-income students to switch to other schools -- and take their federal allocation of money under ESEA's Title I program with them. That allocation ranges from \$400 to \$700 per pupil. So if a student decided to move to another school, the first school would have to fork over his or her portion of the Title I money to the new school. "The money follows the student," Gregg explained, adding that parents could also use the money for individual tutoring of the child.

Gregg's proposal would start out as a demonstration program in 10 states, as yet undesignated. He said Arizona and the city of Milwaukee have already launched such "portability" programs, and have reported improvements in academic achievement by the affected students.

To no avail, Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., objected that Gregg's plan could siphon money from schools already under stress from having to serve large numbers of disadvantaged children, and would pose an "administrative nightmare" for local school districts. But Gregg said states would not have to adopt his approach if they decided it was not a good fit for their schools.

Republicans then turned down an amendment by Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who sought \$1.75 billion to continue the president's program to hire 100,000 new teachers

and reduce class sizes in the first three elementary grades.

"As a former teacher, I can tell you it really makes a difference if you have 18 kids in a classroom instead of 35," Murray said. "It's the difference between crowd control and being able to give the kids the individual attention they need to learn the essentials."

Committee chairman James Jeffords, R-Vt., opposed the amendment, maintaining that his markup bill already contained provisions for reducing classroom size and that Murray's approach was "too prescriptive" in limiting the use of the money for hiring and training teachers. The committee's majority agreed, as 10 Republicans voted against it and eight Democrats for it [Vote 2].

Later, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, proposed Clinton's plan to provide \$1.3 billion to help local schools finance the renovation of dilapidated buildings. "The average age of our nation's schools is 42 years, with 14 million kids in buildings that are unsafe or inadequate," Harkin said.

Republicans countered that they already have provided for financial assistance, in the form of tax-exempt loans, for school construction in another bill that passed the Senate last week. Harkin contended that the GOP plan would help only 600 or so schools, while the president's plan "would help 8,000 schools." But Jeffords insisted that building and maintaining schools "has been and should be the responsibility of state and local governments." Again, 10 Republicans voted against the amendment, eight Democrats for it [Vote 3].

On another issue, the committee voted 9-8 [Vote 4], along party lines, to adopt an amendment by Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., that would help schools strengthen their physical security and anti-violence programs, and also give citizens a way to complain formally about the content of school textbooks by writing to the Secretary of Education. After six months, the secretary would be required to pass the correspondence to the House and Senate education committees.

Democrats scoffed that the textbook provision would amount to having the congressional committees act as "super school boards" to hear complaints from people upset about school books. "Believe me," said Murray, who also served as a school board member, "when parents have something to say about the content of textbooks, the word moves very quickly to (local) school boards."

The committee also rejected an amendment by Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., who wanted \$5 million for local schools to start up a new program to help children who had witnessed domestic violence at home. He cited an FBI study, which indicated that kids who saw violence at home were more likely to engage in violent behavior at school.

Sen. Tim Hutchinson, R-Ark., acknowledged that domestic violence is a serious problem with adverse effects on children, but said the federal government already funds several hundred education programs. "We don't need any new programs," he said, adding that most schools could find enough money to identify and counsel children troubled by domestic violence by tapping existing federal programs. Wellstone's amendment failed on a tie vote, 8-8 [Vote 5].

Democratic members did win approval of one amendment during the Wednesday session. By voice vote, the committee accepted a proposal by Sen. Barbara

Mikulski, D-Md., making it the policy of the federal government to encourage computer literacy among school children. "My amendment," Mikulski said, "would assure that every child is computer proficient by the time they finish the eighth grade."

Recorded Votes

Bill: S. 2 Vote: 1

Gregg amendment enabling school districts to transfer Title I money to other schools if eligible students transfer to other schools.

Tally: 9 Yes, 8 No, 1 Present

Republicans (10)

P Jeffords (R-Vt.)  
Y Gregg (R-N.H.)  
Y Frist (R-Tenn.)  
Y DeWine (R-Ohio)  
Y Enzi (R-Wyo.)  
Y Hutchinson (R-Ark.)  
Y Collins (R-Maine)  
Y Brownback (R-Kan.)  
Y Hagel (R-Neb.)  
Y Sessions (R-Ala.)

Democrats (8)

N Kennedy (D-Mass.)  
N Dodd (D-Conn.)  
N Harkin (D-Iowa)  
N Mikulski (D-Md.)  
N Bingaman (D-N.M.)  
N Wellstone (DFL-Minn.)  
N Murray (D-Wash.)  
N Reed (D-R.I.)