

**President and Republicans Continue to Break
Promise
on Education Funding and Education Reform**

How Many Children Will Be Left Behind?

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July 18, 2003

Promises Made – Real Reform and Real Resources

Just over eighteen months ago, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law.

This signing was the culmination of three years of debate and an intensive one-year bipartisan bill-writing process. There was an elaborate bill signing ceremony. In fact, as I remember, there were at least four of them.

I am proud of the work I did with my colleague Senator Kennedy and our Democratic and Republican colleagues.

But the signing of the policies of No Child Left Behind was supposed to be only the first part of a two-part process.

In meeting after meeting at the White House and on Capitol Hill, the President and his chief aides promised to work with us to ensure that schools had the resources needed to meet the challenge of NCLB's tough reforms.

And, ultimately, we signed our names to a document that specified how much money was needed to implement the reforms.

Not one of us ever said money alone would improve our schools. Not one of us said we should simply spend more money than we were already spending. We all agreed that money and reform went hand in hand.

For the first year of NCLB's implementation we succeeded in holding the President to his promise by securing a historical boost in federal funding for K-12 education that accompanied passage of the legislation.

Promises Broken

However, since that time both the President and the Republican leadership have failed to live up to the funding end of the NCLB bargain.

Their rhetorical commitment to adequate funding has become as phony as the "little red school house" constructed down the street at the entrances of the Department of Education.

We kept our promise on reforms. And we will continue to push hard to ensure that they occur.

But its time our Republican colleagues live up to *their* promise.

House Spending Bill – Smallest Percentage Increase in Eight Years

Last week, the House narrowly approved a bill that provides for the smallest increase in education in many years. This bill provides only a \$2.3 billion or 4.3 percent increase for education - the smallest dollar increase in five years and the smallest percentage increase in eight years.

By contrast, the average increase in education funding during the last four years of the Clinton Administration was 11%.

The 2004 education spending bill under-funds the No Child Left Behind Act by more than \$8 billion. But money in and of itself is not the issue here.

The lost opportunities - for students, teachers, communities, and taxpayers - is the real, albeit avoidable, tragedy caused by the withholding of the promised funds.

Title I. This Republican bill falls about \$6 billion short in funding Title I, the main federal program that provides and targets funds to economically disadvantaged children.

As a result, more than half of all poor children who are eligible to receive additional and intensive instruction in key academic subjects will go completely unserved.

Teachers. The Republican funding bill falls \$244 million short of the \$3.2 billion promised in 2002 to states for improving teacher quality. As a result, approximately 54,000 teachers will not receive the federally promised high-quality professional development that they need to better serve their students.

Teachers are the cornerstone of any effort to reform public schools. Without additional funds, the nice words we put in the bill about such things as quality professional development, teacher recruitment, and salary incentives will remain just that – nice words.

After-School. The Republican education funding bill falls a whopping \$750 million short of the \$1.75 billion for after-school centers promised in the No Child Left Behind Act. This means that schoolhouse doors will be closed to 1 million children on mornings, afternoons, and weekends.

These are the hours we can help children learn and, in many cases, help them keep out of trouble.

Damage Goes Beyond NCLB. But the damage caused by the Republican appropriations bill is not limited to No Child Left Behind. In fact, with this bill, the President and Congressional Republicans have broken numerous other promises that they have made on education.

IDEA Promise Broken. This education spending bill shortchanges the recently passed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by \$1.2 billion, despite the promises of Republican leaders that IDEA “reforms” would be “fully funded.”

Six Republican members of my committee who are cosponsors of bills to fully fund IDEA voted against full funding in Committee.

Dozens of Republicans members who have given lip service to full IDEA funding voted for a rule that blocked a Democratic IDEA full funding amendment on the floor.

I hope *these individuals* are held accountable by all of those to whom they made *their* promises.

Higher Education Promise Broken. But the damage of the Republican education funding bill is not limited to poor, minority, and disabled children in K-12 education.

The Republican education funding bill will also make college and postsecondary job training more expensive for millions of Americans.

President Breaks Pell Promise. On August 30th, 2000, in New Hampshire, Candidate Bush promised to significantly raise the maximum federal college scholarship, or Pell Grant, to as high as \$5100 for each college freshman.

But during the Bush Presidency, we have never gotten close to that figure for any college student.

The current maximum Pell Grant is \$4050. The Republican education funding bill *freezes* Pell grants at that level despite its declining buying power and the rising costs of attending college.

In fact, today, the maximum Pell Grant covers *only* 42 percent of the typical costs at a four-year public university, compared to 84 percent in 1976.

As a result, more and more students are taking on high debt burdens to pay for college. Over the past eight years the typical student loan debt has nearly doubled to \$16,928, with 64 percent of all students borrowing to cover college costs.

At a time of critical need in public schools and in colleges and universities, the House Republicans and President Bush are turning their backs.

They have made a clear choice to provide tax cut upon tax cut to our country's elite and deny millions of Americans access to a quality education and access to the basic building blocks that provide the opportunity to work hard and succeed.

This is no time to breaking promises on education. Far too much is at stake.

In fact, given the hemorrhaging of state budgets stemming from a continuing lagging economy, at a time when schools are laying off teachers and slashing salaries and services, we ought to be increasing aid to education *over and above* what we promised.

Some will say we are merely playing politics with the education issue. I think Senator Kennedy and I demonstrated that we were – and remain – willing to take politics *out* of education.

Partisanship surely should stop at the schoolhouse door. But so should renegeing on the promises we made to America's school children and teachers.

Thank you.