House Passes Dollars to the Classroom Act

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Despite distractions, the House has just done something really constructive, and we hope the Senate will follow suit before adjournment. The House passed Rep. Joe Pitts' (R-PA) Dollars to the Classroom Act consolidating 31 federal education programs into a single flexible grant program for states and communities.

House investigators had discovered that, of the $2.74 billion now flowing to the states through those 31 different grant programs, up to $800 million never made its way into the classroom. Where did those billions go? Probably to fund a redundancy of administrators.

The Dollars to the Classroom Act requires that 95 percent of the $2.74 billion must go directly into classrooms, meaning that it will actually reach students. School districts will be able to select which programs or materials are most needed by their schools, and are even required to consult with parents.

The $2.74 billion is only seven percent of the $36.6 billion of federal funds now authorized for elementary and secondary education. A drop in the bucket, you might say, but it's a start in the right direction for those who believe in local control of public schools.

This bill doesn't reduce any funding and it doesn't eliminate anything (even though many of us were hoping that the Republican Congress would fulfill Clinton's boast that the era of Big Government is over). The bill just moves the decision making from the U.S. Department of Education to local school districts.

Nevertheless, the teachers unions and the education bureaucrats (known to parents as educrats) are downright hysterical about the possibility that this bill may become law. Shortly before the House vote, Congress received letters from 15 lobby organizations, representing almost the entire public school establishment, including, of course, the National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators.

It's clear from their letters that the real reason these organizations oppose this bill is that it will reduce their ability to micromanage public school education at the federal level and through the state departments of education. The letter from the Council of Chief State School Officers reveals why the administrators are so desperate to retain federal control.

This letter argues that "there is no new money in this program." That's exactly right; the purpose of the bill is to use the funds that are already in the federal pipeline for useful things like teaching instead of administering.

This same letter argues that the bill "undermines targeting to national priorities." That's exactly right, too; parents want their school funds spent for local, not national, priorities.

One of the so-called "national priorities" that the Council of Chief State School Officers doesn't want to lose is its own $10 million a year special-interest grant. Another is the grant for education initiatives in eastern Europe.

Parents who contacted their Representatives in support of this bill are particularly happy that this bill enables local schools to spend Goals 2000 and School-to-Work funds for more useful purposes. Those two controversial Clinton programs have stirred up enormous opposition at the grassroots level.

For at least five years, the hottest item privately circulated under the radar screen of the establishment media has been what is known as Marc Tucker's Dear Hillary Letter. Thanks to the House debate on Dollars to the Classroom, this infamous 18-page letter has now made it into the Congressional Record, courtesy of Rep. Bob Schaffer (R-CO).

Tucker, the president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, a private group that has raked in millions of dollars from federal and state taxpayers for his so-called school reform plans, wrote this letter to Hillary Clinton right after Bill Clinton was elected in November 1992. Rep. Schaffer correctly analyzed the letter as "a blueprint for a German model of education that would be forced upon the people of America, and employers, either through force or the threat of force, and done so in a way to redistribute the public wealth, the strength of the federal budget, to those students who voluntarily submit themselves to the new federal credentialing standard for K through 12 education."

Continuing, Rep. Schaffer stated that this blueprint "moves the country toward a government-managed, government-owned centralized education system from kindergarten past college, actually, into the job

training stage. And it really shows the conflict in visions that defines the differences between Republicans and Democrats."

The Marc Tucker letter outlines the Clinton vision of education, which was then codified by the two bills he signed in 1994: Goals 2000 and School-to-Work. Parents don't like that vision, and that's why those two laws have caused such an uproar.

Dollars to the Classroom is a battle for control of the minds of our schoolchildren. We hope the Senate will vote for children rather than Clintonista control of the classroom.