

STOP D.C. VOUCHERS NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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D.C. PARENT-LED GROUP DENOUNCES REP. DAVIS' NEW VOUCHER BILL:

The New Plan Will Destroy, Not Expand School Choice, Leaving 80,000 Children Behind and Underserved by the New Federal No Child Left Behind Law

Washington, D.C.--Stop D.C. Vouchers opposes the newest congressional plan, sponsored by Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA-11), to create a publicly funded private school voucher program in D.C. D.C. offers choice through transformation programs, magnet schools and 42 charter schools in D.C. and these choices are already inadequately funded to meet the accountability mandates required by the Bush No Child Left Behind Law.

"Where is the fiscal impact analysis? For every 30 students taken from the system, critical staff and local and federal funds will be lost. The voucher plan will draw sorely needed dollars away from the choices in our system now and curtail, not enhance choice in our public schools. Meeting the accountability mandates of the NCLB law by some estimates will cost approximately \$9 million, which puts improvements in public schools in direct competition with this new voucher plan whose estimated cost is roughly the same as the NCLB mandate. If D.C. can not adequately fund the NCLB mandates such as improving teacher training, and raising student achievement, schools will not improve and students will lose. Just at the proposal stage alone we see that the goal is to force out public schools, not encourage them to improve. D.C. students will become the casualties of a crusade to impose vouchers at all costs" said Melody Webb, leader of Stop D.C. Vouchers, a D.C. parent-led initiative started by the D.C.P.S. parent who is a D.C. attorney and DCPS graduate mobilizing supporters of public schools who oppose vouchers in D.C..

Stop D.C. Vouchers is part of an overall strategy of community education that is spreading its message across the country, largely via its information-packed website. The initiative has successfully targeted and helped draw attention to vouchers in D.C. via an earlier version of a House bill that was sponsored by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz-6). Linking the voucher proposal to D.C.'s unique relationship with Congress, Stop D.C. Vouchers has enabled local and national citizens to send emails and sign a petition online to protest Congress' actions, which exploit the congressional oversight role over D.C. to impose vouchers on a city that has rejected them. The site can be found at www.stopdevouchers.org

The introduction of this new Davis plan signals the death of an earlier bill, HR- 684, which was sponsored by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz-6) and which was vigorously opposed by pro-public school advocates. Stop D.C. Vouchers helped kill the Flake bill. "We are happy that our efforts contributed to the demise of the 108th Congress' first voucher bill for D.C., which was offered up by Flake. The Flake plan is off, but like a hydra headed monster the voucher proponents in Congress have grown a scarier more powerful head for its voucher-for-D.C. efforts - in the form of Davis' new-and-improved plan."

This legislation is a voucher-only proposal. Davis' plan includes no money for the system of traditional and charter schools in D.C. that need them. Numerous reports in recent weeks indicated that promises were made of funds for D.C. schools to the Democratic Mayor Williams, who bucked conventional wisdom to seek a deal with Bush Administration officials wherein he would support the voucher plan as part of a three sector approach of support for public and charter schools. "Now our Mayor has egg on his face. The students of D.C. are twice wronged - first by having precious funds drained away from their public schools for vouchers, and second by suffering another failed promise of additional resources for those same public schools." Melody Webb stated.

"With Tom Davis at the helm of this legislation, it will take a massive outcry by residents of D.C. and by concerned citizens across the nation to put an end to this impending train wreck" says Melody Webb.

Representative Davis holds the powerful position of chairman of the U.S. House Government Reform Committee, and has unilateral control over legislation concerning D.C. in Congress. (The D.C. subcommittee was abolished last year, ending the panel which historically had given D.C. residents recourse to sympathetic Democrats and moderate Republicans against intermeddling legislation traditionally offered by conservative Republicans.) "Mr. Davis' star is rising in Congress, and if he ushers in the long-held plan by the Republican Party to get vouchers in D.C. he can write his own ticket within the Republican Party. It is a shame that he is riding to glory within the party on the backs of the 80,000 D.C. children that his legislation will leave behind."

When asked about the fairness of 'imposing' the legislation on D.C. residents, Mr. Davis responds that the voucher plan is not mandatory. Because the plan was not sought through the legislative process by D.C. residents or leaders, and in fact was rejected by them, this voucher plan clearly imposes the will of Congress on that of D.C. citizens. In a 1981 referendum, a majority of D.C. voters opposed the implementation of vouchers. In 2002, a Zogby International poll confirmed this result. Residents of the District lack voting rights in Congress and the Senate and also are subject to fiscal and legislative oversight by Congress. D.C. voters have already clearly rejected vouchers but in another instance of bullying, Congress is imposing its will on the citizens of D.C. by pushing this plan.

In addition, on their face, vouchers are a bad idea. A GAO report has found that vouchers do not lead to significant academic gains for students who use them to attend private schools. In fact, a 2003 Cleveland study found that students remaining in public school performed better than voucher school students. Vouchers destroy public accountability for academic achievement, which is the cornerstone of the Bush Administration's NCLB education reform, under which schools must face penalties for not meeting approved standards for teacher training, performance reporting and student testing. Vouchers leave private schools unaccountable for protecting the civil rights of bilingual, disabled, gay and lesbian students (and staff). "We won't know how private schools spend tax dollars or even if they are doing what they claim to for our children. And what happens when a student develops disabilities? Private schools are free to expel them" stated Doreen Hodges, a Ward 8 parent of a disabled child working with Stop D.C. Vouchers. Private schools surveyed have indicated that they would not participate in a voucher plan that required them to meet such standards.

Rep. Davis suggests that his voucher plan is a panacea to the challenges faced by the whole school systems, saying that this is "about offering an alternative for students and parents". D.C. already offers extensive choice through charter, transformation and magnet schools, and public funds should be invested not in a highly experimental plan for 2000 children that has been proven a failure, but in these schools that already exist and have high demand for the sake of the other 78,000 in the system of public schools.

In another development, Theodore McCarrick, the Catholic Archbishop of Washington, has announced his desire for Davis' voucher-only bill to include dollars for public schools. "The Catholic Archdiocese may mean well, but he supports vouchers, which makes his statement hypocritical. To fund vouchers in and of itself is to take away precious resources from the already financially ailing public schools that are seeing after-school programs cut, can't buy adequate textbooks, maintain crumbling facilities, nor in many cases satisfy the most basic of infrastructure needs. The current voucher plan means funding needed to prop up Catholic schools, and throwing a few crumbs one time- this year - at the public schools will amount to nothing when year-after-year public schools have to compete with the never-ending drain on public resources that vouchers will become once they are implemented. The Cardinal's position on vouchers is the height of injustice. In the District there are 6000 slots in the parochial schools. However 1400 of those slots are vacant. So vouchers help to maintain the viability of those Catholic schools. So vouchers really are a benefit to Catholic schools" stated Raymond Blanks, a Ward 6 parent-activist and educator working with Ms. Webb.

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