

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR BYRON L. DORGAN
Senate Democratic Policy Committee and House Budget Committee Democratic
Caucus Joint Hearing
“Have the President and Congressional Republicans Kept Their Promise
To Support the No Child Left Behind Act?”
Friday, July 18, 2003

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act. That law reflected a bipartisan agreement about what levels of funding would be needed in order for schools to meet the new expectations and requirements of the law. In fact, when President Bush signed the law, he said, and I quote: “And a fourth principle is that we’re going to spend more money, more resources, but they’ll be directed at methods that work. ... We’re going to spend more on our schools, and we’re going to spend it more wisely.”

Unfortunately, before the ink of the President’s signature was even dry, the President sent to Congress a budget that leaves the funding behind. In fact, I would argue that, if we were to hold the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans to the same standards when it comes to progress in funding as we are holding schools to, they would undoubtedly receive a failing grade.

Already for FY2003 and now it appears for FY2004, funding proposed by the President and approved so far by Congressional Republicans falls far short of the levels called for under the No Child Left Behind law. The purpose of today’s hearing is to examine the funding record to see if it lives up to the promised levels and to hear from educators about the impact of funding on their efforts to meet the requirements of the new law.

Let me make it clear from the get-go that I supported this law when it was passed by the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support, and I still support it. In general, I think it is very appropriate and important for us as a nation to demand very high standards of performance from our schools and to identify those schools that should be doing better and give them the assistance they need to improve.

Having said that, however, it is not enough to merely identify those schools that need to improve – we need to actually help them to get better. We know the kinds of things that help schools improve – smaller class sizes, a motivated and qualified teacher, getting parents more involved, modern, well-equipped classrooms – and these changes do require money.

I am concerned that a lack of funding to actually help schools improve could set our public schools up for failure, and that is wrong. All of us have an obligation – as parents, educators, concerned citizens, and policymakers -- to get the implementation of this law right.

Let us examine the Bush Administration and Congress's record so far on funding the No Child Left Behind Act: Barely a month after this legislation was signed into law, the President sent to Congress an FY2003 budget that not only didn't fully fund the increases in the No Child Left Behind Act, it actually cut funding by \$90 million. The final FY03 Omnibus Appropriations Act, while providing an increase in funding over the 2002 levels, still fell \$7.2 billion short of the authorized level for No Child programs.

History is repeating itself for FY2004. The No Child Left Behind Act authorizes \$32 billion for elementary and secondary education programs for FY2004. The President's budget for FY04 requests only \$22.6 billion for No Child Left Behind programs -- \$9.4 billion less than the authorized amount and \$1.2 billion less than the FY03 level. For the Title I program alone, the President's budget request is \$6 billion less than the amount promised for FY04.

The full Senate is expected to consider the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill soon. This bill cuts funding for No Child Left Behind Act programs by \$200 million. The Senate bill's total for these programs, \$23.6 billion, is \$8.4 billion less than the FY04 authorized level.

During the Senate Appropriations Committee's consideration of this bill, Senator Byrd offered an amendment that would have increased funding for Title I – the key program for helping schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students improve – by \$6.2 billion to the \$18.6 billion level authorized in the law. I was pleased to support this

amendment, and I would have expected everyone who supported the law to support it. Unfortunately, however, this amendment was rejected on a party-line vote.

Without this funding, we are putting our schools in an impossible situation. Schools do not have the option of not complying with the law. Most schools also do not have the option of making up the funding from state and local governments, since government at those levels are also facing budget crises. Therefore, we are giving schools no choice but to scrimp and cut in areas that are counterproductive to the ultimate goal of improving the quality of education that American children receive. I have heard stories of schools laying off teachers, not updating computer technology, reducing spending on textbooks and other instructional materials, and charging students to participate in extracurricular and athletic activities, among other cost-saving measures. I expect that we will hear more from our witnesses about the very real impact that the shortfall in federal funding is having on students.

I hope that this hearing will help to build the case for why we simply must live up to the bipartisan agreement for full funding of the No Child Left Behind Act. The Senate will have the opportunity to do just that during our upcoming consideration of the Education Appropriations bill, and I hope that at that time, our actions will live up to the promises that have been made to our children, their parents, and their schools.