



NEWS

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It's Sen. Arlen Specter Vs. Washington, DC Schoolchildren

Sen. Specter (R-Penn.) votes against school choice program which would send \$40 million to D.C. schools.

WASHINGTON – In a move that had parent and educational choice groups in an uproar, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) yesterday voted to strip a school choice program from the fiscal year 2004 District of Columbia Appropriations bill. Specter was the only Republican member of the committee who said he would vote with the Democrats to block the school voucher plan.

As part of the District of Columbia \$5.6 billion budget package, the school choice program would divide \$40 million among D.C. public schools, public charter schools and a new private school tuition voucher program giving as much as \$7,500 per student for about 2,000 children.

“Specter’s action is disappointing at best and disingenuous at worst,” said taxpayer advocate Grover Norquist, who heads Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) in Washington. **“He is denying \$40 million of extra money being given to the children of Washington. All the rhetoric about money being diverted from public schools is useless, and his vote means children from low-income families will loose out on the opportunity for the better education they deserve and have no means of otherwise obtaining,”** he continued.

The proposed plan would have the U.S. Department of Education give a \$13 million in Opportunity Scholarship grants to about 2,000 students from low-income families, \$13 million to D.C. Public Schools, \$13 million to D.C. Public Charter schools, and another \$1 million to the city for administrative costs.

The voucher program opposed by Spectre would guarantee low-income students the chance to chose which elementary and secondary schools to attend and would offer them scholarships to study in a better learning environment. It would be available to families earning up to 175 percent of the poverty level, and would award about \$27,000 a year for a family of three.

The voucher program has already gained the support of Mayor Tony Williams as well as many prominent and highly respected DC education leaders.

“If this were an extra \$40 million for Pittsburgh or Philadelphia schools, would Specter have voted no? Mr. Specter voted with the teachers unions and against disadvantaged kids on this bill” concluded Norquist.

Americans for Tax Reform is a non-partisan coalition of taxpayers and taxpayer groups who oppose all tax increases. For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Jonathan Collegio at (202) 785-0266 or by email at jcollegio@atr.org.