



NEWS

AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM

1920 L Street, NW • Suite 200 • Washington, DC 20036
202.785.0266 • Fax 202.785.0261

WWW.ATR.ORG

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CONTACT: Jonathan Collegio
John Santoliquido
202-785-0266

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Feinstein Fine With D.C. Vouchers

California Democrat supports \$13 million school voucher plan for the District

WASHINGTON – Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.) said yesterday that she would break with her party when the Senate Appropriations Committee meets today to vote on the District’s \$5.6 billion budget for fiscal 2004.

The D.C. program will operate during a five-year trial period and will provide federal grants of as much as \$7,500 per child for at least 2,000 low-income students in the District. The Senate bill, however, also provides about \$26 million in additional funding for the District’s public schools, money not included in the House version of the bill.

“It is very encouraging that Sen. Feinstein, who for so long has opposed the idea of vouchers, is finally going to give vouchers a try and thereby give D.C. students a valuable opportunity to get a better education,” said taxpayer advocate Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform. **“While she is only supporting a trial program limited to Washington D.C., I still call that progress coming from all sides on the voucher debate,”** continued Norquist.

Voucher advocates said Feinstein’s backing has the potential to resonate throughout the country, as the movement for vouchers will broaden beyond libertarian and conservative groups, as well as the Republican Party. Some also believe that support within the Democratic Party for vouchers is inevitable, as polls have continually shown strong support for vouchers among parents in the District, and minority constituents more generally. However, the nation’s teachers unions, a massive financial and grassroots backer of the Democratic Party, remain stridently opposed.

Feinstein’s support comes on top of local Democratic support from D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams and D.C. Council member Kevin P. Chavous. The senator included provision in the bill that will allow the mayor to share oversight of the program with U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige.

Mr. Norquist continued: **“D.C. education has been going backward for so long that it can’t go backward very much more. Vouchers will break that trend and give these 2,000 D.C. children an opportunity for a better education.”**

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