



NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
21 NOVEMBER 2003**

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Congressional Negotiators Reach Agreement On D.C. Voucher Program

The first federally funded voucher program may become a reality by year's end

WASHINGTON – House and Senate negotiators agreed Wednesday on a voucher program for the District of Columbia that would provide federal dollars for D.C. parents to enroll their children in non-government schools. The proposal, which is part of a larger spending bill, would create the first federally-funded voucher program in the nation, and it now goes back to the House and Senate for final approval.

President Bush who sought to include a voucher program in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, but the measure was fiercely opposed by teachers' unions. While most congressional Democrats oppose the vouchers, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has joined Republicans in supporting the initiative saying, "We will learn something from this program."

"When this program is shown to work – and it will be shown to work – school districts across America will begin to use Washington DC as a model to follow, instead of one to run away from," said taxpayer advocate Grover Norquist, President of ATR in Washington D.C. **"It is very encouraging that Sen. Feinstein, who for so long has opposed the idea of vouchers, will finally give them a try and thereby give D.C. students a valuable opportunity to get a better education."**

The \$13 million dollar voucher program would operate during a five-year trial period and would provide federal grants of as much as \$7,500 per child for at least 1,700 poor students in the District. That money would be used by parents to send their children to any private, parochial, or charter school of their choice, provided students gain admission and cover any outstanding costs.

In September, the House passed a \$10 million voucher program while the Senate left vouchers out of the D.C. budget bill it passed earlier this week to mollify strident Democrat opposition. Though congressional Democrats remain opposed, they acknowledge that they do not have the votes to prevent passage of the broader spending bill that contains the voucher initiative.

"For these 1,700 children and their parents, there will soon be a choice and, with it, a chance for a better education," continued Norquist. **"The example they set may very well resonate as parents all across the country begin demanding the same choices for their children."**

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.