

# Democrats denounce education bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — An education savings bill that swelled to include a ban on federal reading and math tests along with an attack on federal spending for schools cleared the Senate by a 56-43 vote Thursday after bitter floor debate.

Supporters had promoted the savings bill as a modest way to help working and poor families meet school expenses and if necessary find alternatives to dangerous or substandard public schools.

Opponents described it as a vehicle for tax breaks to help affluent parents send children to private schools.

Before the vote, conservative Republicans had added amendments effectively blocking new federal tests to measure individual math and reading achievement and converting some federal school programs to grants.

And they had rejected administration proposals to use federal dollars to reduce class sizes by subsidizing school construction and forgiving student loans for new teachers or create new after-school programs.

Within minutes of the vote, President Clinton promised a veto if the final version coming out of a House-Senate conference is not

more to his liking. He said the Senate version "weakens our commitment to making America's schools the best they can be in the 21st century."

The House passed its version of the bill last October.

"What this means is the death of public education," said Democratic Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota. He denounced the bill as extreme.

"You're seeing the real Republican agenda coming out on this bill," Daschle told reporters. "It took them a couple of days to vent it, but it's coming out right now."

Republicans depicted the bill as a way to restore control of education where it belongs — with parents, school boards and states — and to rattle an establishment that lets student achievement fall while enriching bureaucrats.

"What we have here is a choice between the status quo and people who want to empower parents to have more of a role in the education of their children," said Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H.

The testing and block grant amendments drove away some would-be Democratic supporters and some Republicans. But others

voted for the bill in hopes that the House and Senate negotiators will modify it when they reconcile their separate versions.

"There is a sufficient amount of good in this bill," said Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla.

The vote was along party lines for the most part. Only Republican Sens. John Chafee of Rhode Island, James Jeffords of Vermont and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania opposed it. And four Democrats other than Graham supported it: Sens. John Breaux of Louisiana, Robert Byrd of West Virginia, Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Robert Torricelli of New Jersey. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., did not vote.

The savings bill, co-sponsored by Sens. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., and Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., would allow tax-free savings accounts to be created for children, starting at birth. Up to \$2,000 a year could be contributed, with money coming from relatives, employers, foundations or other sources.

The interest and withdrawals would be tax-free, and the money could be used for a range of expenses from kindergarten through college, including tuition at private or religious schools. The bill is estimat-

ed to cost \$1.6 billion over 10 years.

But the measure has met vehement opposition from most Democrats and Clinton since it was proposed last year, because of its support for alternatives to public schools.

Democrats blocked debate on the bill four previous times.

The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, the two largest teacher unions and major Democratic allies, have adopted a zero tolerance approach to anything that approaches public support of private or religious schools.

A handful of Democrats said the accounts were worth trying, to add some life to an education system providing weak academic performance and limited choice for the poor.

"I think it is a new approach, and it's entitled to be tried, to be tested," said Byrd, D-W.V. "Public education is going to have to shape up, or else public support for it is going to completely erode."

Both sides entered this week's debate as a way to parade agendas. Democrats seeking re-election this year got some soundbites, but the bill that emerged had conservative

markings.

Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., sponsored the testing amendment on the ground that voluntary tests of individual students against national standards in reading and mathematics would usurp local control of what children are taught. The position is favored by religious conservatives, whom Ashcroft is courting as he weighs a presidential bid next year.

The amendment would prevent further work without specific congressional approval on the standards-based tests, proposed last year by Clinton.

The block-granting amendment by Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., also has strong support by conservative critics of public schools, including advocates of home schooling.

The amendment would let state legislatures choose whether they want to receive block grants to states or districts or to continue with federally directed programs such as bilingual education, aid to poor districts, drug and violence prevention, standards implementation.

Altogether, \$10.3 billion in federal programs would be covered.

# Congress questions shortage of immunity drug

WASHINGTON (AP) — A continuing nationwide shortage of the medicine immune globulin has scientists and Congress asking whether the six companies that make it sell too much abroad or hoard it.

"I think there is in fact on the international market hoarding and speculation that does adversely affect the availability of this vital product," Dr. Arthur Caplan, who leads the government's top advisory committee on blood policy, said Thursday.

On Monday, that committee will order immune globulin manufacturers to explain shortages of immune globulin, which is vital to tens of thousands of

Americans, many of them children, who have deficient immune systems.

Officials say companies have some stockpiles and sell about 20 percent of immune globulin supplies overseas.

The industry insists the shortage is not intentional.

"To my knowledge, that's not true," said Jason Blaback of the International Plasma Producers Industry Association, who said companies merely set aside small inventories especially for emergencies.

The Associated Press in December first reported a severe shortage of immune globulin, which is made from donated plasma.

At the time, the Food and Drug Administration cited several reasons:

- Doctors prescribe it too often. Immune globulin is a proven treatment for pediatric AIDS, bone marrow transplants and primary immune deficiency, but doctors are experimenting with it against chronic fatigue syndrome and other diseases.

- The Food and Drug Act temporarily halted production by one large company last year because of serious manufacturing deficiencies.

- Several batches are quarantined as a precaution against a theoretical threat, brain-destroying Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Some plasma donors

later have been discovered to be at risk for CJD, although it has never been found to spread through blood.

In January, Caplan's Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability recommended that doctors use quarantined immune globulin during the shortage, but warned that it would demand an accounting from industry.

"It's been made known to us that there are supplies of material in the companies' inventories," FDA Acting Commissioner Michael Friedman said Thursday. "We are calling the companies to reinforce the position that there are serious needs and we want them to do everything they can to release the product."

More immune globulin has been sold recently, but the FDA has no authority to compel companies to sell any stockpiles or to limit exports.

Congress has scheduled hearings on the shortage next month. Caplan suggested considering legislation exports until U.S. supplies are adequate, similar to laws that restrict how many donated organs U.S. hospitals can transplant into non-citizens.

Doctors have toll-free numbers that allow them to access manufacturers' emergency supplies, said Dr. George Nemo of the National Institutes of Health. "It's a difficult situation now, but I believe it's being managed."

## Church looks at racism

From Staff Reports

Christ's Place Church is taking the weekend to look at race from a Christ-centered approach.

"Any form of racism is something that we as Christians need to rectify," said Guyla Mills, church member and weekend planner.

The church's third annual Racial Reconciliation Dinner will be held 6:30 Saturday night at Park Middle School, 855 S. Eighth St.

The dinner, which is open to everyone, will feature keynote

speaker Robert Manley, who will speak about racism in Nebraska. Sabor Mexicano, a Lincoln dance group, also will perform.

Before the dinner, about five workshops will discuss topics such as the history of racism in America and how to raise non-racist children.

Church services throughout the weekend will continue to focus on the issue.

Tickets are available at the door for the dinner for \$6. All other activities are free.

For more information, call the church, 1111 Old Cheney Road, at (402) 421-1111.

## Arbor Day festival to bloom

From Staff Reports

There will be a new trend in the trees this weekend when the 126th annual Arbor Day Celebration kicks off in Nebraska City.

The apple blossoms, a great draw for many festival attendees, will be in full bloom Saturday morning for the first time in the event's history, said Paula Darling, tourism director for the Nebraska City Chamber of Commerce.

"It will be tremendous," Darling said. "It should be a beautiful surprise."

The weekend Arbor Day celebration usually draws crowds of 15,000 to 20,000 and will begin this year with a 7 a.m. "Bird Walk"

Saturday at Arbor Day Farm.

At 9 a.m., a 10-kilometer nature and history-oriented walking tour of Nebraska City will begin at the Chamber of Commerce, 806 First Ave.

The groundbreaking ceremony for a new addition to the Lied Conference Center also will take place on Saturday, along with the annual Arbor Day Parade down Central Avenue beginning at 2 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday, Arbor Day enthusiasts can visit the Wildwood Family Fun & Festival held at the Wildwood Period House in Wildwood Park. The family-oriented festival lasts from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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