

Dave Durenberger news



U.S. Senator for Minnesota

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CHARTER SCHOOLS BILL SEEKS TO REFOCUS EDUCATION REFORM DEBATE

Bi-partisan proposal introduced in House and Senate
Makes grants available to help start charter public schools

(Washington, D.C.) -- U.S. Senators Dave Durenberger (R-MN) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) today led a bi-partisan call for a new and more constructive federal role supporting state-based education reform.

Durenberger and Lieberman were joined by two other Senators and four Representatives in introducing the "Public School Re-definition Act of 1993" -- a proposal authorizing federal grants to help start new charter public schools.

Charter schools are now authorized by state laws in California and Minnesota and are being considered by legislatures in a dozen other states including Connecticut.

Founded by parents, teachers, or community groups, charter schools are exempt from most regulations, but must have an outcome-based contract with a local school district or other public agency. They must be non-sectarian, may not charge tuition, and may not discriminate in their admissions based on race, sex, disability, or other factors protected by law.

We must be willing to look at new rules for operating our public schools," Senator Lieberman said in introducing the charter schools proposal. "We owe it to our children. Charter schools introduce an important aspect of choice and creativity into our national vision of public schools."

Other original co-sponsors of the Durenberger-Lieberman charter schools proposal include Senators Bob Kerrey (D-NE) and Slade Gorton (R-WA). A companion bill is being introduced in the House by Representatives Dave McCurdy (D-OK), Tom Petri (R-WI), Tim Penny (D-MN), and Tom Ridge (R-PA).

Proposal refocuses reform debate on outcomes and quality

"In introducing this bill," Durenberger said, "my colleagues and I hope to get the Congress and Administration back on the same education reform track -- all supporting the same goal of improving quality and outcomes in our nation's public schools."

"We believe the debate must be refocused where there is the

greatest opportunity for consensus and greatest opportunity for a strong federal role supporting state-based education reform."

"One good opportunity for consensus," Durenberger argued, "is to support states that are offering parents the right to choose which public school their children will attend -- not just within school districts, but across traditional school district boundaries, as well."

"Public school choice now enjoys the support of a clear majority of Americans," Durenberger noted, "as well as the new President and new Secretary of Education. It's being adopted by many states. And, it's now time to add federal support to states that not only want to offer choice, but are using charter schools to offer more school choices."

"Charter schools will give teachers, parents, and students a chance to choose how to structure their schools and ensure that they obtain the best education possible," said Lieberman. "By promoting the development of new charter public schools directly responsible to the governmental entity which chartered them, both students and their parents stand to gain."

Bill authorizes start-up funding for charter schools

Under the Durenberger-Lieberman proposal, states that have charter schools laws could seek grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Education. Those grants could be used to help fund start-up expenses for charter schools including advance planning, purchase of equipment and supplies, and minor renovation of facilities needed to meet state and local codes.

The proposal requires that schools receiving grants have an outcome-based performance contract with their sponsors. These schools would then be exempt from state and federal rules and regulations. They would be funded on the same basis as other public schools in each state.

Six charter schools have now been approved in Minnesota, with the first such school beginning operations last fall in St. Paul. In California, nine charters have been approved by the state board of education and most of those schools are expected to begin operations later this year.

Both states place a limit on the number of charters that can be granted (100 in California, eight in Minnesota). Other states considering charter schools legislation include, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Michigan, Florida, Colorado, Arizona, Tennessee, and New Jersey.

The "Public School Redefinition Act of 1993" was referred to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee and House Education and Labor Committee.