



Your Congressman Reports

Danny K. Davis

Representative in Congress

December 2003 – 7th Congressional District - Illinois

Education Is Still the Key, “Now More than Ever!”

As we end the year 2003, it is again time to share with you, my constituents, a report on some of the ideas, activities, initiatives, proposals and votes I have taken as your Representative in Congress. At the beginning of this session the leadership acceded to my request to waive the rules and permit me to assume additional committee responsibilities. As a result, *the 7th Congressional District is now represented at the Committee on Education and the Workforce.* This has been a very busy and exciting year for the Committee on Education and the Workforce because so many of our national education programs have been up for reauthorization. We tackled twelve important legislative proposals, all of which were heavily debated. A number eventually passed. Several of my amendments were passed and included in bills even though other provisions in the legislation ultimately precluded my voting for the entire bill.

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The **Improving Education Results for Children With Disabilities Act of 2003** (HR 1350) is designed to guarantee an appropriate and publicly financed education for students with special needs. During debate and markup (the process of amending a bill) my amendment to positively impact the disproportionately high number of African American boys being placed in special education was included. The amendment requires any school district with a disproportionately high number of individuals from any population group to report to the Secretary of Education what actions are being taken to better understand and rectify the situation.

HeadStart has proven to be one of the most successful of all the Great Society programs of the Anti-Poverty era. Being aware of the lack of, and need for, greater male involvement in early childhood education, I was able to get an amendment passed which emphasized the creation of special efforts and programs to recruit and promote additional male involvement in HeadStart. A second amendment restored language in the bill with reference to the inclusion of “culture” and “diversity” with emphasis on the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services. In addition, my amendment to provide scholarship and salary increases for HeadStart teachers were debated, but unfortunately not approved by the Committee.

The Committee has begun work on the Higher Education Act reauthorization and although major issues such as the cost of college and financial aid, including student loans, have not been discussed yet, we have passed bills concerned with better preparing future teachers, increasing the amount of student loans which may be forgiven for teachers in mathematics, science, and special education, graduate programs and international studies. The **Student Loan Fairness Consolidation Act** (HR 2504) to assist borrowers who are paying off student loans with high interest rates, another of my initiatives, would permit individuals with consolidated loans that have high interest rates, to refinance to take advantage of variable market rates.

During the **Workforce Investment Act** reauthorization (HR 1251), my amendment to add ex-offenders to the “hard to place” population group was accepted.

No Child Left Behind implementation continues to be hotly discussed and heatedly debated throughout the nation. It is certainly a hot topic in the 7th District and during the month of November I sponsored two exciting townhall meetings dealing with the subject. On November 12, 2003 (1:00 p.m.) At the Oak Park/River Forest High School,



Congressman Davis frames some basic policy issues surrounding the implementation of the “No Child Left Behind” legislation now confronting educators at one of his recent Townhall meetings on education. At this meeting (Wednesday, November 12, 2003) Federal, State and local education officials from the 7th District were brought together to interact and share concerns on a range of issues related to this federal legislation. Also pictured: Dr. Cohen and Ms. Lieberman. Photo courtesy of *Wednesday Journal of Oak Park.*

we met with Dr. Mary Elizabeth Cohen, representing the U.S. Secretary of Education and Ms. Gail Lieberman, representing the Illinois State Board of Education. Present from our district community and testifying on behalf of their schools were Superintendent Tyra Manning (River Forest - District 90), Superintendent Rebecca Montoya Kostro (Bellwood - District 88), Ms. Jennice Jackson, Director of Curriculum Instruction, Superintendent Elizabeth Reynolds (Maywood - District 89), Superintendent Randy Tinder (Forest Park - District 91), Superintendent Myra Sanders (Westchester - District 92 ½), Superintendent Jack Fagan (Oak Park - District 97), Superintendent Sue Bridge (Oak Park/River Forest - High School District 200), Superintendent Gregory Jackson (Proviso East and West - High School District 209). Also in attendance were State Senator Donald Harmon, State Representative Karen Yarbrough, Dr. Barry Greenwald (Board Member District 200) and other school board members.

Dr. Cohen explained the intent of the legislation as seen by President Bush and Secretary Paige. Ms. Lieberman detailed the State's responsibilities relative to the implementation of the law.

Almost to a person, the education experts expressed misgivings about the legislation and its ability to improve the functioning of our schools or the education of our children. Some suggested that the goals were laudable but there was too much focus on testing, not enough opportunity for gifted students, and not enough resources to finance the challenges. Some suggested that the standards were too rigid, not enough differentiation exists between expectation for students with disabilities and all other students. There was expression of concern that not enough time had been given for Illinois to develop procedures for implementation.



Juan Montescinos and Jill O'Brien and their children Lucia, Gabriela and Carlos from Oak Park made a special "Field Trip" as part of their children's education to Washington to speak with Congressman Davis about education issues.

That very same evening we moved on to the National Teachers Training Academy, 55 West Cermak Road in Chicago. Once again, Dr. Cohen from the U.S. Office of Education and Ms. Lieberman, from the Illinois State Board of Education were present. Joining them as panelists were Mr. Xavier E. Botana, Director of No Child Left Behind Accountability for the Chicago Public Schools, Ms. Julie Woestehoff, Executive Director, PURE, and Mr. Derrick Harris, Executive Director of the Lawndale Local School Council Federation. The audience was made up primarily of teachers, principals, education activists and parents.

Once again, the discussion was spirited, many different points of view were expressed and, at the end, many of those present were of the opinion that "No Child Left Behind," was as much a slogan as it was substantive. Not many disagreed with the desire to foster greater accountability; however, many felt that goals and standards were unrealistic without additional resources, thereby creating another unfunded mandate. ●

Congressman Davis Opposes Medicare Bill

[In a year of many controversial votes, no vote was closer, or more heatedly debated in the Congress and among the American people, than the Medicare prescription drug legislation. Below are remarks given by Congressman Davis on the eve of the vote.]

Mr. Speaker, we promised the American people we would protect and strengthen traditional Medicare. This legislation does the opposite . . . it begins moving millions of seniors out the common Medicare insurance pool into private HMOs.

It creates huge new tax shelters for the ultra wealthy with the ironic name of "Health Savings Accounts." Meanwhile the very poorest seniors, those who also qualify for Medicaid, will see their benefits cut.

The bill places new caps on future Medicare services and spiraling new tax burdens on middle income working families. The bill inaugurates the process of means-testing and asset-testing seniors before providing them benefits . . . checking their wallets before checking their health. It will add heavy new financial burdens to state budgets already strained to bursting by federal cutbacks.

All this in return for a woefully inadequate prescription drug benefit and skyrocketing drug company prices and profits as far as the eye can see.

Mr. Speaker, this Medicare prescription drug bill is not what it is advertised to be. It is a danger to the health and well being of America's seniors.

As Representatives of the American people, we have a special moral responsibility to be honest with the people. This legislation breaks that sacred trust. This bill deceives and dispossesses America's seniors. This is plain wrong.

I'm with Will Rogers: I'd rather be the man who bought the Brooklyn Bridge than the man who sold it. I'm voting against this legislation and I urge every member of this great House to stand up for seniors with a resounding **NO** to this bill and a resounding **YES** to the same quality Medicare prescription drug coverage for seniors we give ourselves. ●

Davis Fights for Employment Opportunity, Overtime Protection, Pension Security and for Ending the "Enron Cycle"

Given the high rate of unemployment in Illinois, I have been very concerned about serious deficiencies in legislation proposed this year providing the assistance needed for the unemployed, or to protect overtime pay, pension and retirement savings and have therefore been moved to *vote against them in Committee and on the floor of the House.*

One such piece of legislation which failed to provide real and meaningful assistance for the unemployed was HR 444, a bill to establish a **Personal Reemployment Accounts** Grant Program. HR 444 would require the unemployed to pay for otherwise free job counseling and training services. This bill will hinder those trying to return to work, rather than providing assistance.

HR 1000, a bill that would provide additional protections to participants and beneficiaries in Individual Retirement Accounts was proposed as a response to the **Enron scandal**. However, close analysis of HR 1000 reveals that it would not only permit additional "Enrons" to occur, it would actually make it easier. It fails to stop companies from raiding older worker's pensions, allows for investment advice from sources with conflicts of interest, fails to restore and promote fairness between the pension rights given to executive versus those of rank and file employees and fails to give employees real control over their hard earned savings.

The concept of **overtime pay** is being threatened on several fronts. Overtime pay has become an important part of the basic income for many households. HR 1119 would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide compensatory time for employees in the private sector. The Department of Labor estimates that between 2.3 and 3.1 million workers, who should get overtime pay, will be disqualified under this bill, thus resulting in longer, and less regular, hours for less pay for these employees.

In the case of each of these bills I vigorously supported constructive Democratic alternative legislation to address these critical issues and will continue to actively seek out meaningful, forward looking solutions. ●

Public Safety Ex-Offender Self Sufficiency Act Gains Momentum

Ex-offender re-entry continues to be one of the major problems facing urban America as communities are continuously faced with the challenge of how to help individuals returning from jail and prisons reintegrate themselves successfully back into normal society.

We now have sixteen co-sponsors to HR 2116, the Public Safety Ex-Offender Self Sufficiency Act including Representative Henry J. Hyde from the 6th District of Illinois. The Illinois General Assembly passed two new laws, which the Governor has signed. These bills will take effect on January 1, 2004 and should aid ex-offenders with rights relative to criminal background checks and their ability to obtain employment as well as continuing to raise awareness of the problems of ex-offender re-entry.

I shall hold an **ex-offender expungement summit**:

Expungement Summit
Saturday, January 10, 2004 – 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church
4610 South Martin Luther King Drive – Chicago, Illinois



The Moore family (Christopher, Tangina, Christopher II, LaSharon and Fatima (in stroller) of Chicago visited Washington to speak with Congressman Davis about ex-offender issues.

Volunteer lawyers will be present to advise individuals on how to get their records cleared. The Cabrini Green Legal Aid and First Defense will train lawyers on the new laws. Ex-offenders can learn about the expungement process, executive clemency and the Certificate of Good Conduct. The summit is free and open to the public. ●

2004 Challenges and Projections



As we move into 2004, please know that there are many public policy issues to discuss and many challenges ahead of us. By some measures, the economy has begun to move a bit; nevertheless, unemployment in our district is way too high and seriously in excess of the national average. Employment opportunities are continuing to dry up as manufacturing businesses flee the city and, in many instances, are leaving the country. As reliance upon technology increases, we find that many of our residents have not kept pace and are not prepared for the technical opportunities which exist.

There are shortages of nurses and other medical personnel and yet many of our schools are not preparing young people for these positions and opportunities. Far too many of our residents are addicted to habit forming drugs, in some neighborhoods the streets are filled with individuals standing on the corners hollering "crack and blow, pills and thrills." Too many of our children are wards of the state, living in foster homes or shelters for battered women and children with their mothers.

We are engaged in a highly dubious war, terrorism continues to threaten us and all around the world there is international strife. The environment and health status of our district are in great need of improvement and our institutions are always in need of protection.

I have established functioning **advisory committees** to help me deal with these and other issues. As residents of the district I invite you to join one or more of these groups to help make policy decisions for our community and for the nation. To join please call 773-533-7520 or visit on line at www.house.gov/davis. ●

I am initiating an effort to provide more drug treatment opportunities. If you are interested please call: 773-533-7520.

My **next townhall meeting** will be held:

Tuesday, January 6, 2004 – 6:00 p.m. till 8:00 p.m.
Chicago Historical Society Auditorium
1601 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-1307

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