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March 21, 2007

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KENNEDY FLOOR STATEMENT ON EDUCATION BUDGET PRIORITIES  
Remarks focus on rebuttal to comments made by Senator Gregg

As prepared for delivery

I'd like to take a few minutes to respond to some of the points made by the Senior Senator from New Hampshire made yesterday regarding the track record of the Administration and Republican Congress on education funding.

Senator Gregg points to historic increases in NCLB funding under President Bush. What he doesn't point out is that most of that increase happened in the first year after enactment of NCLB when Democrats controlled the Senate and demanded a substantial increase. Since then, new funding for elementary and secondary education has plummeted.

No Child Left Behind is only half the story. Under Republican control of the Senate, increases in funding for education programs overall have gotten smaller year after year [CHART]. Two years ago, funding for education was actually cut by over half a billion dollars. Last year, the President proposed the largest cut to overall education funding in the history of the Department of Education (\$2.2 billion), and again this year, the President proposed an overall cut of \$1.3 billion.

My colleague from New Hampshire is right that President Bush claims to include an increase of \$1 billion in NCLB funding in his budget for this year. But it is not a real increase. First, it does nothing more than fill the cut that was enacted in 2006. And worse, as he has time and again, the President robs other education programs to pay for it. As I mentioned, overall, he proposes a \$1.3 billion cut to education programs overall. That's not providing new resources for our schools – that's a shell game.

But even more important than these points is the fact that the funding that has been secured is simply insufficient to fulfill the bipartisan promise to leave no child behind. This was a promise – not a political slogan. But year after year of broken promises from the White House and the Republican Congress have left 3.7 million children behind. Their budgets have meant larger not smaller class sizes. They've meant fewer teachers trained.

This irresponsible neglect comes at a time when schools are being asked to do more.

Senator Gregg also claimed that the Republican Reconciliation bill last Congress provided \$9 billion in student benefits and did not cut \$12 billion from the student loan programs.

The facts are that \$22 billion was cut from the student loan programs. About \$9 was "spent" by that bill – more than half of it on sweeteners for the banks such as increased loan limits on federally subsidized loans and reduced origination fees which translate to increased profits for banks.

A small grant program was included, but as Senator Gregg acknowledged yesterday, 90% of students are not eligible for that program – 4.7 million Pell eligible students were left out in the cold.

The Senate bill included \$6 billion in grant aid for all Pell eligible students, but the Republicans jettisoned that proposal in a partisan conference.

This program also wrongly limits eligibility to students to be enrolled in school full time to be eligible – so forget it if you're trying to support a family and have to work while

you're trying to get your degree. This limitation and others related to curriculum also excludes virtually all community college students.

But the most important fact is one conceded by the Senator from New Hampshire -- the vast majority of the cuts to student loan programs were not dedicated to student aid. Instead, \$12 billion was used to offset tax giveaways for the wealthy.

Our schools, children and families deserve more than accounting gimmicks. Our schools need new resources to make progress on reform, and families need real help to afford a college education for their children. Republican budgets have provided neither.