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Note to Board and Supporters
FROM: Jeanne Allen

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Clinton Administration Raises the Ante on School Choice

Over the weekend, President Clinton voiced the threat of a veto on the DC school choice measure. The proposal, as you know, is currently pending in Congress, and scheduled to be "marked-up" in the House appropriations committee on Thursday, with a vote in both Houses to follow within the next ten days.

Education Secretary Richard Riley also delivered a speech this morning at the National Press Club, in which, according to several reporters we spoke with, he was much more pointed and confrontational in his remarks about vouchers than ever before. In the speech, Riley said the following:

"Vouchers are wrong for many reasons and we need to be clear about what is at stake. Vouchers undermine a 200 year American commitment to the common school...

"Vouchers would begin the unraveling of this uniquely American fabric...

"I do not think that vouchers proponents have thought long and hard about the very negative consequences of 'balkanizing' public education...The background paper we are releasing today notes that vouchers would reduce public accountability and make private schools less private....[scare tactics]

"I worry, too, that those who support vouchers have become almost MYOPIC in their insistence that public education is failing across-the-board. Tell that to the parents in Montgomery County, or in Louisville, Kentucky...or in countless school districts across the country where parents and community leaders support public education.

"The current \$7 million DC voucher initiative in Congress...targets 2,000 children and leaves another 75,000 behind. Is this fair."

The speech was also filled with high-charged rhetoric about public education getting better, and bad schools needing to be reconstituted and reformed rather than "abandoned." Strategically, look for more of this kind of rhetoric, in which opponents attempt to show their concern and acknowledgment about the problems plaguing schools, but suggest that things are getting better already and we should focus on ridding schools of social promotion, raising standards and reorganizing schools that (he says) have demonstrated progress.

Riley also released a White paper today, which has as its main point that 'Vouchers threaten the fundamental mission of public education.'

Both the speech and white paper are available to you at your request.

The good news is that today, twenty members of our DC parent coalition were planning on making several visits to Members of Congress. So with our assistance, at 2 pm, Congressmen Arney, Watts, Talent (and others?) were joined by our parents in a press conference to respond to both the President's and Secretary Riley's remarks.

It is clear that the ante is up because the Administration may lose several of its Democratic members on this issue. At least five are leaning toward voting for the DC school choice measure in the Senate, and several in the House.

We're delighted we were able to be there for the response, just one event of many we've delivered in the last several weeks.