

Additional Views Regarding the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Report on Education at the Crossroads 2000

As members of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, we wish to elaborate on several points in contrast to the report issued by the Chairman.

It must be said at the outset that we are very disappointed at the failure of the 106th Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Education policy at the turn of the century demands strong leadership and bipartisan effort to do what is right for America's children. The fact that our committee did not finish its work on ESEA, and that neither the House nor Senate took final action on the legislation is a sad commentary on the bitter partisanship and posturing that has replaced clear thinking and real leadership in Washington.

We are further disappointed that the true lessons of the Crossroads hearings have been lost in the majority report. The subcommittee heard from many individuals at the forefront of education policy and in the trenches of education process, and we all agree that education is best served at the local level. But we must also be honest and remember that the federal role in public education represents only seven percent of overall spending and is focused on providing dollars and services to students most in need and to whom adequate and fair education services have not otherwise been met by local and state programs.

What we heard at the hearings was an appreciation for the attention paid to the challenges faced by schools and educators, and new ideas for increasing the effectiveness of the federal investment. We do not concur with this report's conclusion that federal education policy has failed schools or has set education quality back. It is impossible to gauge the overall state of education in America had the federal government not provided the targeted funds for disadvantaged students since 1965, and we regret the tone of the report and that the bulk of its contents focuses on partisan, divisive rhetoric rather than the good ideas our witnesses suggested.

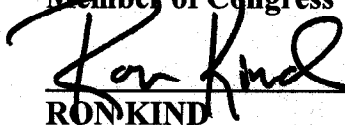
We take particular offense to the charges of mismanagement and abuse leveled at the current Department of Education. Time and again, Secretary Riley has been heralded as an exemplary Education Secretary, perhaps the most dedicated and most effective the office has known to date. To suggest that criminal or negligent actions of individual employees of this large agency somehow reflect on the competence or integrity of its policy makers and top managers lends credence to the proposition that this report is largely politically motivated and misdirected.

In a highly charged political season such as that in which we are now engulfed, it is expected that politics will rule over common sense. It is unfortunate that our Subcommittee report has met this expectation to such a great extent. I think most of the

members of the Subcommittee, on both sides of the aisles, agree that many of the new strategies for enhancing quality and accountability in education that we studied are very promising and worth exploring further. But many of the points for which we could find agreement are lost in the report's focus on blame and divisiveness. The report's conclusion that "children should be put first" is, of course, at the heart of all of our efforts in Congress and at home. We see the challenges public schools still face and we want to work for the betterment of education for all children. We are all reformers now, and we hope those of us who will be in the next Congress will roll up our sleeves and sincerely work to advance the cause of public education in America.

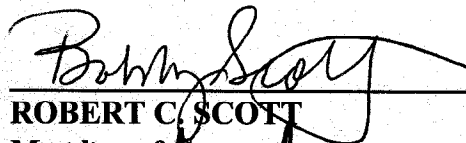
Respectfully submitted,

Member of Congress



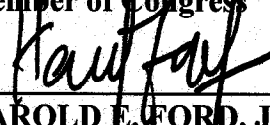
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