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## The Price of a Good Education

In mid-November, President Bush vetoed an appropriations bill that included some \$63 million in education funding, sending a loud and clear message to the American people: Education is not a priority. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives nearly overcame the veto but were just two votes shy of the two-thirds majority needed to override it. Until a compromise can be hammered out, Title I, special education, school leadership funds, and other discretionary education programs will be held hostage.

A gaping deficit remains in education funding. Discretionary funding for education did increase between fiscal years 2001 and 2003, but for the past four years, funding for education has been flat.

Putting the federal budget in perspective, data from a New America Foundation report titled *Budget Showdown 2007: The Facts Behind Education Funding* indicate that even if Congress' proposed FY 2008 discretionary education funding increase of approximately \$4 billion is passed, education funding still will be only five percent of discretionary funding and less than three percent of the overall federal budget.

Currently, the government is being funded under a continuing resolution at 2007 fiscal levels. That resolution, however, is set to expire on December 14, forcing Congress and the White House to battle their way to a compromise or risk a government shut-

down. Historically, long-term continuing resolutions and "omnibus" appropriation bills have proved financially damaging to federal education programs because Congress tends to choose level-funding or it applies across-the-board cuts to programs in an effort to stay within an agreed upon funding cap.

If either possibility comes to pass two deserving programs—Title I and IDEA—will take a big hit, causing students at risk to, once again, be left at the bottom of the heap. Title I has received slight funding increases, which have failed to cover increased student enrollments and inflation. And the federal government has yet to meet its promise to special education students. IDEA was initially established with the understanding that the federal government would support 40 percent of the excess costs of educating students with special needs. Currently, the federal government provides a mere 17 percent, forcing states and school districts to make up the rest.

Next month marks the start of a new year and with it should come a recommitment from all of us to raise our voices in protest against the current inadequate funding provided to our nation's most precious resource—its children. The irony in this era of No Child Left Behind is that no children will be able to move ahead to pursue their dreams and reach their goals if we fail to commit ourselves to paying the price of a good education.