

OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. JOHN BOEHNER (R-OH),
CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

H.R. 1, *No Child Left Behind Act*, Mark-Up

Wednesday, May 2, 2001

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Good morning. Let me extend a warm welcome to all of you, to Congressman George Miller -- the ranking member, and to my other colleagues.

Everyone on this committee shares the same ultimate goal: improving the quality of our nation's schools and ensuring that every child is given the opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential. This bill was crafted in good faith, in honest discussions between members. And it meets the goals for education that President Bush set out during his campaign: giving states and local school districts more flexibility while holding them accountable for closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.

I have made considerable effort to bring a bipartisan spirit and a tone of civility to bear on the process that has led us here today.

And I think what we have accomplished thus far -- a bona fide bipartisan agreement -- is significant. More important is what this agreement represents for our nation's students: new hope, the chance to reach their fullest educational potential; and for what it represents to parents: empowerment, the opportunity finally to make the right decisions for their children's future.

The need for a substantial overhaul of the federal role in public education is undeniable: Nearly 70 percent of inner city and rural fourth graders cannot read at a basic level; low income students lag behind their counterparts by an average of 20 percentile points on national assessment tests; and one-third of all incoming college freshmen enroll in a remedial reading, writing, or mathematics class.

Scores on the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that there was *no improvement* in reading scores among fourth-graders since 1992. The latest NAEP scores also revealed that the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students has in fact widened over the last eight years.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* is a bold plan. It represents an important break from the past.

We have crafted a plan that will dramatically enhance flexibility for local school districts, giving them the freedom to make spending decisions with up to 50 percent of federal elementary and secondary education dollars they receive as long as they demonstrate results. Under current law, rigid and unnecessary federal rules frequently hamper local schools in their efforts to meet the unique needs of students.

It also includes what we call a “safety valve” for children trapped in failing schools. It would provide immediate public school choice for children in schools identified as failing, including the option to transfer to a charter school or a better performing public school. It would allow parents of children in failing schools to obtain supplemental educational services such as tutoring after three years of persistent failure. This “safety valve” empowers parents with new options and offers new hope for students in failing schools.

It’s my view that the parents of students in failing schools deserve additional choices as well, including the option of private school choice. For that reason, I included it in the original version of H.R. 1 and have included it again in the chairman’s mark we’ll consider today.

H.R. 1 also establishes a comprehensive accountability system, including asking states to build on their existing state assessments by designing and implementing annual math and reading tests for students in grades three through eight. The plan provides federal dollars for states to design the tests.

Together, these three components -- flexibility, accountability for results, and the “safety valve” for students trapped in chronically failing and dangerous schools -- will transform the federal role in education.

The time is ripe for meaningful education reform. We can’t let this opportunity slip away. I look forward to a vigorous debate on this bill over the next few days, and remain confident that this Congress will accomplish what the President has challenged us to do this year. At this time, I will yield to my friend and Ranking Member, Congressman George Miller for any statement he may have.