

Hagel's Floor Speech On IDEA Full-Funding May 12, 2004

Washington, D.C. – Today, U. S. Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) spoke on the Senate floor about full-funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The following is Senator Hagel's speech:

Mr. President, I rise today to offer an amendment, with Senator Harkin, to S.1248, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Re-authorization bill. Our amendment will provide mandatory increases in funding of \$2.2 billion per year to fully-fund Part B of the IDEA program over the next six years. This amendment will allow us to reach our federal funding commitment to IDEA by Fiscal Year 2010, and fulfill our nearly 30-year-old federal commitment to the states, our schools, and children with disabilities.

In 1975, Congress guaranteed children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education. This means that – whatever the cost – states and local school districts are mandated by federal law to provide the necessary services to educate a child with a disability. Congress understood that this federal mandate would be costly. As a result, it agreed to provide states with 40 percent of the cost of educating these children.

Unfortunately, states have been bearing the bulk of the costs associated with IDEA for nearly 30 years. The states have upheld their part of the deal – Congress has not. This is why I believe mandatory funding is warranted for the IDEA program.

IDEA is one of the largest unfunded mandates imposed on the states. And everyone in this body has heard from their Governors, school boards, administrators, teachers, and parents about the importance of this issue. Unfortunately, instead of making IDEA funding a priority, Congress continues to pass new education programs that require more money, more resources and more responsibility from the states.

Senate Passes Major Increase in IDEA Funding May 12, 2004

Washington, DC – The U.S. Senate today passed an amendment to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by 2011. The amendment to the IDEA re-authorization bill will increase discretionary funding for IDEA by roughly \$2 billion a year over the next 7 years. U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE), along with Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), offered an amendment to provide mandatory annual increases of \$2.2 billion per year over the next six years to IDEA. Hagel's amendment received 56 votes, 4 votes short of the 60 votes needed to override a budget point-of-order.

Since 2001, Hagel and Harkin have worked to increase IDEA funding. In 2001, the Senate passed a Hagel/Harkin amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act to provide mandatory funding for IDEA. The amendment was removed during a House/Senate Conference Committee.

“Today’s increase in IDEA funding is a significant victory. Meeting our federal commitment to IDEA would help local school districts fund additional priorities, such as facility improvements, teacher salaries, and purchasing upgraded hardware and software for the classroom,” Hagel said.

“I will continue to work to make funding for IDEA mandatory. While we have made great progress in increasing IDEA funding over the last seven years, it is only by making funding for IDEA mandatory that we can assure full funding for the program. Until funding is mandatory, we will continue to work for funding increases every year,” Hagel concluded.

When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it committed to funding 40% of the costs imposed on states to meet the mandates of IDEA. Congress has never funded more than 20% of the program.

The Senate hopes to pass the IDEA re-authorization later this week. Following passage it will go to a House/Senate Conference Committee.

The text of Hagel’s IDEA floor speech is below.

For the past seven years, I have worked on a bi-partisan basis to increase funding for IDEA. I thank Senators Harkin, Dodd, Jeffords, Kennedy, Warner, Collins, Chafee, Snowe, Coleman, and Roberts for their past support.

Three years ago, the Senate passed an amendment, that Senator Harkin and I authored, to the No Child Left Behind Act. The amendment provided mandatory funding for the IDEA Program. Unfortunately, this amendment was removed during a House/Senate conference in 2001. Today, we have another opportunity to show the Senate’s support for mandatory IDEA funding by passing the Harkin/Hagel amendment.

Although we have had great success in increasing IDEA appropriations from \$2.3 billion in Fiscal Year 1996 to \$10.1 billion in Fiscal Year 2004, we still have a long way to go before meeting our total federal IDEA funding responsibilities. The cost of special education is high. By under-funding the federal government’s portion of IDEA, states and local school districts are forced to pick-up the additional costs, adding to their already heavy tax burdens.

Our amendment has nothing to do with expanding the federal role – it’s about meeting the existing commitments of the federal government ... under current law. While I share the same budgetary concerns as others in this body, I remind my colleagues that despite our recent progress on IDEA, we are still only about halfway to meeting our federal goal. We are not meeting our statutory commitments. And although we make budget promises year after year – we continue to fail in meeting our annual discretionary funding goals for IDEA.

Last year, the Senate adopted a budget amendment that would have increased IDEA funds by \$2.2 billion in Fiscal Year 2004. Unfortunately, we came up \$1 billion short by the time we finished the appropriations process. This is another example of why mandatory funding is necessary to fulfill Congress’ commitment to IDEA.

Meeting our federal commitment to IDEA would help local school districts fund additional education priorities, such as facility improvements, teacher salaries, and purchasing upgraded hardware and software for the classroom. And the Harkin/Hagel amendment would not take away the authority of Congress to re-authorize this program. In fact, our amendment includes language that states nothing shall prevent future re-authorizations.

I urge my colleagues to vote today to fulfill our commitment to IDEA funding.

Thank you Mr. President. I yield the floor.