INSIDE D.C.

Clinton Tries to Sink an 'A+' Plan

by Gary L. Bauer

On Tuesday, July 29, you probably awoke to "feel-good" news coverage of the bipartisan budget and tax deal. What the news didn't tell you is that behind the scenes a battle raged between congressional leaders and the White House over a little-publicized provision of the tax package. This Senate-passed provision, sponsored by Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.), would allow parents to create tax-sheltered education savings accounts and make withdrawals for the education needs of their children in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Tuesday evening, President Clinton threatened to veto the entire tax relief bill — which he had publicly endorsed that afternoon — if it allowed parents to withdraw their own money from education savings accounts to pay for elementary and high school expenses. Around 10 p.m., Clinton called Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) personally to issue his post-press conference veto threat. The Speaker and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) had just received a letter from the president vowing to sink the entire tax package over Sen. Coverdell's pro-education initiative.

The president, who has made the same kind of proposal for college "tax relief," was catering to the demands of the liberal education establishment whose interest is in maintaining its monopoly over K-12 education in America. At the end of the day, Congress bowed to the president's demand.

Now congressional leaders are taking their case to you, the American public, and giving you a second chance at education savings accounts. Three days after the successful veto threat, Sen. Coverdell and Speaker Gingrich introduced a first-step proposal that could soon make "A+ Accounts" available to families. Under their Parent and Student Savings Account Plus (PASS A+) Act (S. 1133, H.R. 2373), parents could contribute up to $2,000 in after-tax dollars annually to an A+ Account for each of their children. Interest accruing on the accounts would be tax-free, and parents could make withdrawals for expenses at their choice of public, private, religious or home schools.

For example, if a family were allowed to save $2,000 per year after a child's birth, they'd have $14,488 when he or she enters first grade (at 7.5 percent interest). This money could be used to finance therapy if the child struggles with speech, or tutoring if help is needed with math. If the child sails through elementary school effortlessly, there will be $36,847 in the account when he or she enters junior high. The money could pay lab fees, purchase school uniforms, or be saved for college. If gang violence becomes a problem in high school, this money would make another public or private school, where safety and learning opportunities would be enhanced, a viable alternative.

An important objective of this bill is to facilitate helping others while encouraging families to save for their children's education. Individuals could contribute to the accounts of children other than their own, thus spreading the benefit to those who might not otherwise be able to afford quality education.

Some may see the financial benefits of this first step as minimal. Remember, however, that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. We at FRC focus on providing better opportunities for American families while minimizing the need for accountability to the federal bureaucracy. The barriers that this administration and the National Education Association (NEA) have established between parents and educational choices for their children must be overcome.

Every child has different educational needs. A one-size-fits-all education system cannot be expected to meet them all. Parents must pitch in here, take up the slack there but doesn't it make sense that they have the benefit of saving their own money for educational necessities? A+ Accounts allow those closest to the child — parents — to find the best solution for individual education needs. WW

FRC's New College Student Program

by Alan R. Crippen

On August 8, FRC commissioned its inaugural class of the Witherspoon Fellowship, FRC's new leadership development program for college students. This summer, 14 young men and women hailing from universities across America came to FRC for a semester of intensive work and study as Witherspoon Fellows. Reflecting on the experience, Gavin Gilmour, a law student at Washington University, commented, "My experience as a Witherspoon Fellow provided amazing growth in my life spiritually, intellectually and professionally. In the classroom I was confronted with the relationship between Christ and culture and the social and political vulnerability of the 'naked public square.' I am consumed by

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a new worldview and a great sense of urgency for change and renewal. While in Washington, I have had a chance to roll up my sleeves and pitch in. I have a newfound desire to be part of the great public discourse and to enter the political realm as a Christian who refuses to check his most earnestly held beliefs at the door." The Witherspoon Fellowship operates during the fall, spring and summer semesters. For more information, interested students may contact FRC at 1-800-225-4008 or visit our Web site at http://www.frc.org. WW