



Parent Advocate

SCHOLARSHIP TAX CREDIT BILL INTRODUCED

Legislation has been introduced in the Nebraska Unicameral that would help children in limited-income families to enroll at private elementary and secondary schools. **LB 67**, the Elementary and Secondary Education Opportunity Act, proposes a state income tax credit for individuals and businesses that donate to non-profit scholarship programs, generally identified as School Tuition Organizations (STOs).

State Senator Mike Friend of Omaha introduced LB 67. Senator Tony Fulton of Lincoln is cosponsoring the bill.

School Tuition Organizations would be required to annually distribute at least 90 percent of donated funds as private-school scholarships



Senator Friend



Senator Fulton

for children in Nebraska-resident families whose household income is below 300 percent of the federal poverty line. All non-profit, privately operated elementary and secondary schools that satisfy the state's school-term requirements and do not discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin would qualify for scholarship use.

The legislation proposes to limit the tax credits on an annual basis as follows: \$2500 for individual contributors and \$5000 for married couples filing joint state income-tax returns; \$10,000

for corporations; \$5000 for partnerships, limited liability companies and subchapter S corporations; and \$5000 for estates and trusts. Applications for these tax credits would be pre-approved by the Nebraska Department of Revenue on a first-come, first-served basis until reaching an annual maximum of \$3 million.

School Tuition Organizations could be established in multiple ways; for example, on a diocesan or statewide basis for Catholic schools, or a regional collaboration of several private schools. The only limitation is that an STO must provide scholarships for at least two schools.

LB 67 was referred to the Revenue Committee, of which Sen. Friend is a member. The committee's chairperson,

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19.8 Billion

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Except for Bolstered Current Programs

STIM Package Mostly Excludes Private Schools

It appears that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the nearly \$800 billion economic stimulus package ultimately passed by Congress and signed into law by the President, is somewhat of a mixed bag for private elementary and secondary schools. It includes unprecedented amounts of federal funds for education, a little of which should benefit eligible students attending private schools, but the overall package mostly excludes these schools from the stimulating mechanisms.

Details were sketchy as *Parent Advocate* went to print, but here is some of what was known, thanks to a "Friday the 13th" update from the Council for American Private Education.

The House-Senate reconciliation added "modernization, renovation, or repair of public school facilities" as an allowable use by school districts under the \$53.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) component of ARRA.

The explicit "public school" reference shuts out private elementary and secondary schools from participating in this program. Ironically, a separate section of the SFSF does allow for the use of funds to modernize, renovate or repair facilities of private colleges and universities.

Regarding other components of the SFSF, the final version of ARRA does not include an explicit requirement that money from the fund benefit children in private schools in any equitable way. Nonetheless, portions of the SFSF are earmarked for current federal educational programs, some of which (e.g., Title I, ESEA [\$10 billion] and IDEA-Part B for equitable special-education services [\$11.7 billion]) have their own provisions for including eligible students regardless of the schools they attend. Ensuring adherence to these indirectly applicable requirements for ARRA funds could be a new advocacy challenge for parents and others who support non-governmental schools.

TEXTBOOK LOAN PROGRAM AND EDUCATION BUDGET

Legislative Bill 315, a proposed mainline budget for state government operations in the next fiscal biennium introduced on behalf of Governor Dave Heineman, includes a modest increase in the appropriations for the textbook-loan program. The Governor proposes to boost this line-item from its current level of \$450,000 to \$500,000 for each of the two fiscal years in the biennium.

These appropriations are used by public school districts to purchase the number of new textbooks they need, over and above the program's separate inventory, in order to fulfill textbook-loan requests from resident parents of students attending private schools. No local school district funds are required to be used to purchase textbooks for the loan program. Rather, funding is provided through the legislated appropriation. The program has been in effect since 1990, after it was ruled to be constitutional

in all respects by the Nebraska Supreme Court.

The increase in this line-item of the Governor's budget plan resulted from a meeting that several members of the NFCSP leadership board had with him in November 2008. Participating in that meeting were Jeff Wilmes of Fremont (NFCSP President), Kent Bieker of Falls City, and Terry Pfeifer of Grand Island, along with the three Diocesan Superintendents of Catholic schools: Msgr. James Gilg of of Omaha; Msgr. John Perkinson of Lincoln; and Father Tom Ryan of Grand Island. Also attending was Jeremy Murphy, the Nebraska Catholic Conference's Associate Director for Education Issues, who arranged for the meeting.

Subsequent to being introduced, by the Speaker of the Legislature on behalf of the governor, **LB 315** was sent to the Legislature's Appropriations Committee.

The committee will take the better part of three months reviewing and considering all aspects of the Governor's proposed budget and using it as a framework for developing its own spending plan, which it will advance to the full Legislature no later than the 70th legislative day. It will be subject to three rounds of consideration.

In an early, preliminary vote, the Appropriations Committee tentatively approved the Governor's line-item recommendation for the textbook-loan program by an 8-1 tally.

The Governor's budget recommendations also include a \$100 million increase in state aid for public school districts and a \$16.8 million increase for special-education reimbursements to school districts. Under his overall plan, increases in state spending for the two years in the biennium would average 6.1 percent for K-12 public education and 4.6 percent for special education reimbursements.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK PROCLAMATION

With diocesan administrators and students representing some 28,000 of their peers throughout the state on hand as witnesses, Nebraska Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy presented a proclamation signed by Governor Dave Heineman for Catholic Schools Week 2009.

Participating in the ceremony on Jan. 21 at the State Capitol were (front, from left): Jade Wawers, Lauren Bieber, and Kaleb McQuillan, St. Patrick's School, Lincoln; Trace Jones, St. Stephen the Martyr School, Omaha; Maddie Meyer, St. Margaret Mary School, Omaha, (back, from left) Rev. Thomas Ryan, Superintendent, Grand Island Diocese Catholic Schools; Amanda Ferguson, and Matthew Honerman, North Platte St. Patrick's High School; Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy; Msgr. John Perkinson, Superintendent, Lincoln Diocese Catholic Schools; Msgr. James Gilg, Superintendent, Omaha Archdiocese Catholic Schools.



BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS RECOGNITION



Two Nebraska Catholic schools received special recognition as Blue Ribbon Schools by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings in 2008: **St. Margaret Mary School** and **St. Stephen the Martyr School**, both in Omaha. The schools were nominated by the Council for American Private Education (CAPE).

Only fifty private schools nationwide received this honor. Secretary Spellings said "These Blue Ribbon Schools are an example of what teachers and students can achieve. Now our challenge is to help other schools follow their lead. . .and...to replicate effective strategies and help every student improve."

Congratulations!



HOW TO CONTACT YOUR NEBRASKA STATE SENATOR

You can e-mail the senator through the Nebraska Legislative webpage at <http://nebraskalegislature.gov> or by using the legislator’s first initial plus complete last name followed by @leg.ne.gov (example: lheidemann@leg.ne.gov).

The senator’s regular mailing address : Senator _____
 District # _____ State Capitol
 P. O. Box 94604
 Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dst. Senator	Capitol #	Room	From	Dst. Senator	Capitol #	Room	From
1 Heidemann, Lavon	471-2733	1004	Elk Creek	26 McGill, Amanda	471-2610	1017	Lincoln
2 Pankonin, Dave	471-2613	2004	Louisville	27 Coash, Colby	471-2632	1117	Lincoln
3 Price, Scott	471-2627	1528	Bellevue	28 Avery, Bill	471-2633	1114	Lincoln
4 Pirsch, Pete	471-2621	1404	Omaha	29 Fulton, Tony	471-2734	2107	Lincoln
5 Mello, Heath	471-2710	1206	Omaha	30 Wallman, Norm	471-2620	1406	Cortland
6 Nelson, John E.	471-2714	2028	Omaha	31 Pahls, Rich	471-2327	1401	Omaha
7 Nordquist, Jeremy J.	471-2721	1208	Omaha	32 Karpisek, Russ	471-2711	1015	Wilber
8 White, Tom	471-2722	1120	Omaha	33 Utter, Dennis	471-2712	1529	Hastings
9 Howard, Gwen	471-2723	1124	Omaha	34 Dubas, Annette	471-2630	1018	Fullerton
10 Friend, Mike	471-2718	1212	Omaha	35 Gloor, Mike	471-2617	1523	Grand Island
11 Council, Brenda J	471-2612	1115	Omaha	36 Wightman, John	471-2642	2010	Lexington
12 Lathrop, Steve	471-2623	2000	Omaha	37 Hadley, Galen	471-2726	2104	Kearney
13 Cook, Tanya	471-2727	1115	Omaha	38 Carlson, Tom	471-2732	1022	Holdrege
14 Gay, Tim	471-2730	1402	Papillion	39 McCoy, Beau	471-2885	1117	Omaha
15 Janssen, Charlie	471-2625	1403	Fremont	40 Dierks, M. L. “Cap”	471-2801	2108	Ewing
16 Rogert, Kent	471-2728	2011	Tekamah	41 Sullivan, Kate	471-2631	1019	Cedar Rapids
17 Giese, Robert J.	471-2716	1118	So Sioux City	42 Hansen, Tom	471-2729	1012	North Platte
18 Lautenbaugh, Scott	471-2618	1021	Omaha	43 Fischer, Deb	471-2628	1110	Valentine
19 Flood, Mike	471-2929	2103	Norfolk	44 Christensen, Mark R.	471-2805	1000	Imperial
20 Ashford, Brad	471-2622	1103	Omaha	45 Cornett, Abbie	471-2615	1116	Bellevue
21 Haar, Ken	471-2673	1522	Malcolm	46 Nantkes, Danielle	471-2720	1008	Lincoln
22 Stuthman, Arnie	471-2715	1101	Platte Center	47 Schilz, Ken	471-2616	1202	Ogallala
23 Langemeier, Chris	471-2719	1210	Schuyler	48 Harms, John N.	471-2802	2017	Scottsbluff
24 Adams, Greg	471-2756	1107	York	49 Loudon, LeRoy J.	471-2725	1016	Ellsworth
25 Campbell, Kathy	471-2731	1019	Lincoln				

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Sen. Abbie Cornett of Bellevue, scheduled a public hearing on the bill for February 27 at 1:30 p.m. at the State Capitol in Lincoln. In addition to Senators Cornett and Friend, other committee members are Senators Tom White of Omaha, Cap Dierks of Ewing, Greg Adams of York, LeRoy Loudon of Ellsworth, Dennis Utter of Hastings and Galen Hadley of Kearney.

Action Needed—You Can Help

Grassroots support for LB 67 is extremely important to the outcome of the bill. NFCSP members are urged to contact the members of the Revenue Committee to respectfully request that the bill be advanced to the full Legislature for floor debate. E-mails, phone calls and letters that state a clear message of **Support for LB 67** are appropriate and much-needed. A sizable turnout of NFCSP members at the public hearing also would be helpful, as a means of emphasizing the importance of the bill for private-school families.

LB 67 represents not only an incentive for businesses and individuals to contribute to scholarship programs and an

opportunity for qualifying families to be assisted in their educational choice, but also a modest measure of educational and tax justice for families that support two systems of K-12 education. The economic downturn has placed even greater pressure on families desiring to make the educational choice they deem best for their children, especially families struggling within relatively close range of the poverty line.

States already utilizing the STO tax-credit policy include Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. In neighboring Iowa, the program is responsible for \$7.5 million in annual receipts for STOs and is making a significant difference for private-school families.

The NFCSP’s leadership board has established a committee to develop a broad base of support for scholarship tax credits, including businesses and other private-school organizations. Board member Jim Stolze of Omaha is leading this committee. Any NFCSP member interested in assisting should contact the Nebraska Catholic Conference office.



SUPERINTENDENTS MEET WITH NEW COMMISSIONER

On February 12, the superintendents of Nebraska’s three Catholic diocesan school systems—Msgr. James Gilg of the Archdiocese of Omaha, Msgr. John Perkinson of the Diocese of Lincoln and Father Tom Ryan of the Diocese of Grand Island—joined by two staff members from the Nebraska Catholic Conference—Jim Cunningham, executive director and Jeremy Murphy, associate director for education issues—traveled to Elkhorn for an introductory meeting with the new Nebraska Commissioner of Education, Dr. Roger Breed.



Dr Roger Breed

account for nearly 30,000 elementary and secondary school students, constitute three of the largest school systems in the state. He expressed appreciation for Catholic schools’ commitments to academic excellence and the diocesan superintendents’ participation in state policy deliberations. All participants in the meeting agreed on the importance of open lines of communication between private-school administrators and the office of the Commissioner.

Dr. Breed is currently wearing “two hats” as an education administrator: closing out his tenure as Superintendent of the Elkhorn Public School District; and preparing for his duties as Commissioner of Education. He will become the full-time Commissioner on March 30.

On another matter, Dr. Breed announced Feb. 12th his nomination of the superintendent of the Hartington Public School District, Dr. Scott Swisher, as the new Deputy Commissioner. Approval for the hiring of Dr. Swisher will be considered by the State Board of Education at its meeting on March 3. He would begin his work at the State Department of Education on July 1.

Dr. Breed noted that the diocesan school systems, which

NEW STATE BOARD LEADERSHIP ELECTED

The Nebraska State Board of Education has elected Kandy Imes of Gering, as its new president, succeeding Fred Meyer of St. Paul. Jim Scheer of Norfolk was elected vice-president of the eight-member board.

Mrs. Imes is a 1968 graduate of Norfolk Catholic High School and a graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Nursing. She represents the State Board’s 7th District which includes most of the state’s western half .

In accepting the presiding role, Mrs. Imes said, “My goal is to lead the State Board of Education in open and fair deliberations as board members search together for common ground. Moving the board forward in greater unity as we make policies and decisions with Nebraska students at the center encompasses my goals.”



A Gift for our Nation

Based on the average public school per pupil cost of \$8,701, Catholic schools provide **\$19.8 billion** in savings each year for the nation. Source: U.S. Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2007-2008: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing

NEBRASKA FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

Identity Unity Collaboration Empowerment

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