

LARSON INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO MANDATE FULL FUNDING FOR "IDEA" SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Legislation Will Make Federal Government Pay Fair Share; Easing Financial Burden on States and Towns

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today introduced bipartisan legislation, the Full Funding for IDEA Act Now Act, H.R. 823, that will require the federal government to begin fully funding its share of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) to lessen the financial burden on state's and municipalities. Originally enacted in 1975, IDEA authorized the federal government to cover 40 percent of the cost of special education in order to provide all students with disabilities a free education that met their needs. In this year's omnibus appropriations bill, the federal government will fund only 18.4% of IDEA, meaning that town and state education must absorb not only the 60% of state cost required by law, but also the 21.6% that the federal government refuses to pay.

Larson stated: "With the passage of IDEA, Congress made a commitment to fund 40% of the program to avoid placing an unfair burden on schools, municipalities, and states, and simply never followed through. It is time for the federal government to live up to its commitment to those that Congress has placed this burden on: state and municipal governments.

"State legislators, school administrators and teachers in Connecticut have expressed to me that one of the greatest challenge facing school systems today is the cost of special education. With all the rhetoric about leaving no child behind heard in Washington and talk of more tax cuts that benefit the very wealthiest Americans, fully funding the federal share of IDEA is a small price to pay to educate children and lessen the financial burden on states and towns.

"For example, in the last completed school year of 2001-2002, the Town of Berlin spent \$4,721,372 on special education, with all but \$361,543 locally funded. Well short of the oft-stated goal of 40% federal financing. One can only begin to imagine the burden IDEA requirements, in the absence of federal funding, imposes on our local school district," said Larson.

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