

LARSON: DESPITE PROMISES, CONGRESS TO AGAIN SHORTCHANGE SPECIAL EDUCATION

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) today gave the following statement on legislation to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), H.R. 1350, the federal law that governs special education in the nation. The House will also take action this week on the omnibus appropriations bill which funds the federal government, including IDEA. While today's legislation authorizes the federal government to fund 40% of the cost of special education, the appropriations bill does not appear to provide equivalent funding for fiscal year 2005.

"I will certainly vote to authorize the federal government to fully fund its share of special education," said Larson. "Unfortunately the House will also pass the omnibus appropriations bill this week which does not come close to providing the actual dollars needed to meet that obligation. When IDEA was originally passed in 1975, Congress promised that it would fund 40% of its cost. Since that time, it has never funded more than 19 percent.

"It does not matter how much funding is authorized if Congress refuses to provide that level of funding in the appropriations bill. Congress is again shortchanging special education. This broken promise means a continued financial burden on the states and municipalities that must shoulder most of the enormous cost of special education. Thirty years ago, Congress also said it would fully fund IDEA by 1982, yet this legislation again extends that until 2011. It will not come as a surprise if that timeline is again pushed back when Congress again reauthorizes the program again that year. The Congress has a moral obligation to fulfill this promise and has failed. In their refusal to meet their obligation to special education, Congress and the Republican Majority are failing states, municipalities and most importantly, students."

Larson has introduced legislation, H.R. 823, which would mandate that the federal government immediately fund its full share of IDEA.

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