

In Iowa's Interest: Saving Teacher Jobs and Improving Education

Written by Sen. Tom Harkin
Monday, 23 August 2010 08:37

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As the warm summer days begin to wind down and students prepare to head back to the classroom, back to school shopping isn't the only thing on people's minds.

This spring, headlines told the story of massive education job losses in states around the country, including right here in Iowa. These losses would have been devastating, and would have pushed the U.S. education system to fall behind.

Earlier this year, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan testified before my Appropriations subcommittee that as many as 300,000 teachers and other educators would be laid off during the school year that begins this month.

Well-educated Americans are the single most important factor in maintaining our productivity and global leadership, to creating and keeping good jobs in our country, and in preparing our children to contribute to their communities and our nation at their full potential. To ensure our future success, we must do everything we can to provide our children with the best education possible.

I have been fighting a sometimes lonely battle to provide new assistance to states in order to prevent a significant loss of public school teachers and other critical school personnel. But finally, earlier this month, that battle was finally won and the Senate passed the "teacher jobs" bill.

Thanks to this legislation, we can prevent the lion's share of further job losses and I hope that many of those laid-off teachers can be brought back into the classroom. This bill will provide an estimated \$96 million for Iowa and save approximately 1,800 jobs in our state alone. And on top of that, this bill is paid for and reduces the federal deficit.

With this teacher jobs bill, we are setting tough priorities in a very difficult budget environment.

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We are saying that it is our priority to keep teachers in the classroom, and to prevent the derailment of important reform efforts in our schools. Quite simply, we can't improve our Iowa public schools if we are laying off teachers, raising class sizes, slashing programs and cutting instruction time.

We still have a long way to go, and must continue to work to ensure that America stays competitive in the global economy and has the best education system in the world, but this teacher jobs bill is a great victory for our children and an important step for our public schools.

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