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**Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Hearing on FY2011 Department of Education Budget  
April 14, 2010**

**Context:** The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing this morning on the U.S. Department of Education's FY2011 budget and the need for additional federal support to maintain education positions during the economic downturn. Secretary Arne Duncan was the sole witness for the Subcommittee's first panel, with Dr. Joseph B. Morton, Alabama State Department of Education, Chris Bern, President, Iowa State Education Association, Ramon C. Cortines, Superintendent of LA Unified School District, and Marc Herzog, Chancellor Hartford Community College, serving on the second panel. The majority of committee members expressed support for the Department's FY2011 budget request, while conveying some concern about the Department's proposed program consolidation and the impact of anticipated state budget cuts.

**Testimony Summary – Panel One:** Chairman Harkin (D-IA) set the stage for the hearing by commenting on the overall budget increase for Education and the successes of the Department's ARRA programs, most notably the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Chairman Harkin also remarked on the success of the SAFRA legislation, and its elimination of subsidies present in the student loan system and strengthening of the Pell Grant program. However, the Chairman expressed his concern over state and local budget crises and its impending effect on layoffs, and indicated his intent to introduce legislation, \$23 billion for the Keep Our Educators Working Fund, to save jobs. Ranking Member Cochran (R-MS) echoed Chairman Harkin's concern over educator cuts and layoffs.

Secretary Duncan's testimony also focused on the impact of state and local budget cuts on educator job loss, increased class size, and programmatic cuts, and he supported Chairman Harkin's proposal to introduce emergency spending legislation to provide \$23 billion to save education jobs. Secretary Duncan also discussed the Department's FY2011 budget proposal, stating that while formula funding would keep its focus on special populations, such as low income and special education students, the Department would continue driving the reforms from RTTT, I3, and other programs through competitive grants. Duncan added that finding funding for the President's proposed State Early Learning Challenge Grants program is a high priority for the Department of Education.

**Discussion Focus:** Following Secretary Duncan's testimony, members of the Committee participated in a question and answer session with the Secretary.

- The first question raised by Chairman Harkin concerned the elimination of the State Early Learning Challenge Fund from the SAFRA legislation signed by President Obama in March. The Chairman said education starts at birth and strong support for early learning programs is critically needed, and that wishes to work with the Secretary to find funding for the Challenge Fund. Secretary Duncan echoed the Chairman's concern, and indicated that the Department wants to work with the

Subcommittee to adjust the President's proposed FY11 budget to make room for the State Early Learning Challenge Fund.

- Many subcommittee members focused their questions on the structure, scoring, and investment in the Race to the Top Fund. Chairman Harkin questioned whether RTTT should be focused more on the structure of the education system, rather than on only rewarding a few states, given the dire state budget situation. The Secretary responded by stating that attention needs to be paid to both bold reforms and job loss concurrently, and that the amount of change resulting from RTTT, which accounts for less than 1% of the overall Education budget, is extraordinary. Sen. Landrieu (D-LA), in addressing RTTT, commented that she found fault with the scoring of RTTT, notably that outlier scores were not dismissed, and expressed concern over the high weight given to states that have 100% participation rates from LEAs. The Senator indicated that if Louisiana were to secure 100% buy-in, that it would almost certainly result in watered-down reforms. Additionally, Senator Shelby expressed dismay that the Department allocated only 15 points to STEM. Senator Harkin echoed this concern and indicated that he intends to follow-up with the Department of Education about placing a greater emphasis on STEM.
- Another concern that many subcommittee members raised was the issue over fair funding and programming for rural populations. Sen. Cochran (R-MS), Sen. Alexander (R-TN), Sen. Pryor (D-AR) and Sen. Shelby (R-AL) commented about the need to ensure that rural school districts have access to the same funding opportunities, and noted for example the elimination or reduction in funds for the Rural Initiatives program and the Migrant Education program. Secretary Duncan informed the Subcommittee that the Department shares their sentiment and is working on making sure that rural districts are provided with additional resources, noting the competitive priority in I3 and scaling up what works throughout the country.
- Concerns were also raised by members regarding specific program cuts, specifically Teach for America (Sen. Cochran and Sen. Landrieu) and the Teaching American History program (Sen. Alexander). Secretary Duncan stated that he is a strong advocate of the TFA program, and that TFA would have access to significantly more funds by competing in the new programs the Administration has outlined. Additionally, the Department has proposed a new program aimed at providing funds for additional curricular subject areas, including history, civics, and the arts.

**Testimony Summary – Panel Two:** Chairman Harkin (D-IA) and Sen. Shelby (R-AL) reiterated their concern over budget cuts and the impact on educator job loss and program cuts. Testimony provided by Dr. Joseph B. Morton, Alabama State Department of Education, Chris Bern, President, Iowa State Education Association, Ramon C. Cortines, Superintendent of LA Unified School District, and Marc Herzog, Chancellor Hartford Community College, provided concrete, local examples of the dire situation affecting local school districts and colleges.

**Analysis:** Overall, the tone of the Committee hearing was positive, with players from both parties expressing their commitment to working together. The key areas of concern for members included funding and programming for rural and small communities, balanced with the needs in urban areas, as well as the immediate need to focus on preventing additional layoffs to educators, school personnel and support staff.