

MN Political Roundtable

Op-Ed: IF John Kline Wants To Address School Dropouts, He Needs Frederica Wilson on NCLB Conference Committee

MN Central
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First, let's commend Republicans Ryan Costello (PA-06), Carlos Curbelo (FL-26), Frank LoBiondo (NJ-02), Martha McSally (AZ-02), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27) and Mike Simpson (ID-02) for rejecting Chairman John Kline's logic that we cannot afford to address dropouts.

With the House having completed its reform of No Child Left Behind with a partisan bill (zero Democrats voting in favor with 27 Republicans rejecting Chairman Kline's Student Success Act) and the Senate approving Every Child Achieves Act by a vote of 81-17 which featured 39 Republicans joining the Democrats to pass their version, the next logical step is a House-Senate conference committee.

Well, IF every child is to achieve and students are to be successful, the dropout problem must be part of the discussion.

Sadly, Chairman Kline spoke out against an amendment that would have addressed the issue.

The amendment was offered by someone with knowledge and experience on the matter — Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL-24).

In 1993, Congresswoman Wilson founded the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, an in-school dropout prevention/mentoring program for boys ages 9-19. The program serves approximately 8,000 boys annually and its goal is to provide young boys with a carefully chartered path to manhood by pairing them with adult mentors whose legitimate success can inspire them to successes of their own.

“In my career as an educator, school principal, and school board member, I know what works in children's lives. In situations where a young person is missing a consistent, supportive, and loving presence, there is one simple intervention that can

make all the difference—a good mentor,” said Congresswoman Wilson. “Mentoring is a powerful and cost effective way to help our youth and our nation succeed.”

Congresswoman Wilson spoke passionately on the floor “Simply put, mentoring is a proven cost-effective investment. In fact, for every \$1 invested in mentoring, there is a \$3 return to society.”

Chairman Kline responded — with praise and a fiscal response :

I want to start by thanking the gentlewoman for the amendment, although I do oppose it, and commending her for the outstanding work that she has personally done in this area of mentoring and helping kids get through school and off to a life with hope, rather than a life of crime and gangs. She has done remarkable work.

The gentlewoman’s amendment calls for another \$125 million of spending in the first year and such sums thereafter. I am afraid this is yet another Federal program that will be chronically underfunded and competing for funding that the schools so desperately need.

While I admire her passion and her personal hard work in this field, I continue to oppose this amendment and ask my colleagues to oppose this amendment.

NOTE : Although \$125 million is a lot of money, in terms of Washington spending, it should be put in context ... for example John Kline and House Republicans plan increase funding to \$275 million on charters schools in Washington DC alone ... and Congress has no problem approving amendments for foreign aid ... such as the recent \$40 million amendment to study “the feasibility and advisability” on developing an anti-tunneling defense system for Israel.

So in KlineLogic, do not spend any money on a known problem as he wants the money spent elsewhere.

The roll call was all Democrats, and the six above-cited Republicans, saying YES, “we gotta address the dropout problem” and 237 Republicans saying NO ... “John Kline has the right vision for America“.

After the final vote was cast for John Kline’s education vision (218 to 213), Congresswoman Wilson issued a statement:

To my great disappointment, the U.S. House of Representatives today narrowly passed H.R. 5, the Student Success Act, to reauthorize elementary and secondary education legislation formerly known as No Child Left Behind. Either name is an oxymoron, however, because this bill does not offer solutions to the educational crises taking place in the nation's low-income and low-achieving school districts.

We have a bill that guts funding for schools that are already hanging on by a shoestring, will now have access to even fewer resources. It eliminates standards that would require schools or districts to lend a helping hand to struggling students so that they can achieve at grade level and graduate from high school, which will add to the growing number of students who fail to earn a diploma that has already reached more than 500,000.

It is a statistical fact that high school dropouts earn on average \$630,000 less than high school graduates, depriving our economy of \$300 billion in worker income each year. Higher dropout rates in minority, low-income and immigrant communities also contribute to income inequality and health disparities.

As a longtime former educator and school board member who is still deeply involved in the academic success of my youngest constituents, I also oppose measures in H.R. 5 that fail to support educators. The legislation eliminates requirements for them to enhance and expand their professional development and shifts funding for the few programs left that do support teachers away from the poorest schools.

That's the problem ...

Frederica Wilson was an educator, school principal, and school board member who decided her voice needed to be heard in Congress ...

John Kline has not spent any time on a school board or responsible for a classroom, he's just part of the Washington establishment that does not listen.

Frederica Wilson's voice needs to be on the NCLB conference committee.