

Senate likes education goals

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration won Senate approval Tuesday of legislation to implement national education goals and ensure that students are adequately prepared for the "jobs of tomorrow."

"These bills will benefit America's most valuable resource - our children," Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, said. He predicted the result would be "a better country, both from an economic and social perspective."

Meanwhile, on a third school bill, the Education Department accepted a House committee's compromise that earmarks to the poorest children a share of education dollars for the disadvantaged - but not as much as the administration had sought.

The Senate voted 71-25 in favor of the Goals 2000 bill, the centerpiece of the administration's legislative agenda for education.

The separate School-to-Work Opportunities Act, approved by a 62-31 vote, authorizes \$300 million in state grants for partnerships between high schools and businesses to help students who do not go on to college. The bills now go to separate conference committees that will work out differences with the House.

"This is 'hire education' that offers hands-on learning to help students envision and plan for the jobs of tomorrow," said Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., chief sponsor of the work-opportunity plan.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich noted that both measures passed with Republican support. "There is no partisanship when it comes to schools, when it comes to kids," he said.

As the Senate acted, the House Education and Labor Committee voted 41-1 to target new money approved for the so-called Chapter I program for disadvantaged students to the poorest school districts. In fiscal 1995, that would total about \$700 million of the \$7 billion the administration has proposed for Chapter I.

Ninety-three percent of the nation's school districts and 66 percent of all public schools receive some Chapter I funds. Because the funds are spread so thin, the poorest districts have insufficient money to serve all their high-poverty schools, the Education Department said.

The department had proposed targeting 50 percent of the Chapter I funds. That would have had the effect of reducing federal education dollars to about half the counties.

"This is as strong as we could have gotten," said

Education Undersecretary Marshall Smith. He said the department would press its original proposal when the bill goes to the Senate.

The Goals 2000 vote comes five years after the nation's governors and then-President Bush agreed to six national education goals. The legislation would write those goals into law. It also would finance efforts to develop voluntary national standards in key subject areas and provide \$400 million in grants to states and local governments that want to reform their education programs.

"There is a real yearning in this country for change in education," Education Secretary Richard Riley said.

He said the measure provides a framework for helping teachers, schools and parents bring about the kinds of changes needed to promote a world-class education for every child in America.

The Senate, by a vote of 59-34, defeated an amendment that would have cut off federal funds to programs that distribute contraceptives to minors without parental consent. An alternative, telling those agencies to encourage family participation in contraceptive distribution programs, was approved 91-2.

Senators also defeated, 52-41, an amendment that would have launched an experiment to give poor students a choice of attending public or private schools.

The House version of Goals 2000 would require states to develop standards in such areas as curriculum content and to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to learn. The Senate measure would encourage those standards.

The Senate bill also would encourage school districts to allow students a brief period of silence for reflection, and would deny federal money to any school district that prohibits "constitutionally protected prayer."

The six national education goals state that by the year 2000:

- All children will arrive at school ready to learn.
- The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
- Students will master challenging subject matter.
- U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science.
- All adult Americans will be literate and able to compete in a global economy.
- Every school will be free of drugs and violence.

Florida State researcher learns how to make taxol using common chemicals

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida State University chemist has figured out how to use common chemicals to make taxol, a cancer drug until now extracted only from the scarce Pacific yew tree or the twigs and needles of similar plants.

"It's a scientific research breakthrough," researcher Robert Holton said Tuesday. "It may also be important for cancer patients not only now - but in years to come."

The taxol now being used comes from the Pacific yew in old-growth forests home to the endangered spotted owl, according to Saul Schepartz, who oversees treatment research at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.

But an alternative method using the twigs and needles of similar plants has been perfected and should be approved sometime this year, Schepartz said.

That method, discovered by Holton nearly three years ago, involves about four different chemical reactions. It's known as semi-synthesis.

Total synthesis - the laboratory production of taxol from common chemicals - involves some 40 different chemical reactions and takes about two weeks, Holton said.

"It's a significant lab accomplishment," Schepartz said. He estimated at least a dozen labs nationally had been working on taxol synthesis.

"There's intense interest in it," he said.

Holton's team synthesized the drug last month and got word Monday that the Journal of the American Chemical Society would publish articles about the process.

"We did it. We're tired," Holton said, adding that many of his colleagues had called the total synthesis of taxol an impossible challenge. "It's like climbing to the top of a mountain that's never been climbed before."

Holton's achievement "may enable researchers to devise more-effective, less-toxic drugs of the taxol class and could thus have a significant effect on cancer treatment," said Samuel Broder, director of the National Cancer Institute.

Broder has called taxol the most important cancer drug in 15 years.

It has shown the most promise in the treatment of ovarian and breast cancers in women who have not responded to treatment with other drugs. It also has shown promise in early trials against certain lung cancers.

It takes the bark of about three full-grown trees to produce enough taxol to treat one cancer patient.

The trees thrive in the shade of the same dwindling old-growth forests that are home to the threatened northern spotted owl. Lawsuits to protect the owl habitat have brought logging to a virtual halt on national forests in the Northwest, where most of the yews are found.

FCC extends cable revenue freeze while it conducts review

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Communications Commission is extending the freeze on cable TV revenues to May 15 while it conducts a review of the prices charged for service.

A revenue freeze imposed last year during implementation of new rules was due to expire Feb. 15.

But an outcry last fall over changes in how cable companies bill customers - which resulted in charges that many people received higher bills - led the agency to reconsider its rate rules.

The agency is expected to review its rules this month and officials said extending the revenue freeze would make it easier to implement any new regulations.

At the same time, local communities are in the process of certifying their local cable companies as monopolies, a process that permits them to regulate basic cable service.

As of the end of January, systems have been certified for 7,500 of the nation's 33,000 communities with cable. Commission officials said the revenue freeze also extends the time for the remaining communities to act.

Rate regulation cannot be enforced until local communities have received FCC certification that the local cable company operates as a monopoly and thereby is covered by the new law.

It's up to the local authority to enforce the law governing charges for basic service - the package of channels comprising local broadcasters and government and public access cable channels.

The FCC enforces the section of the law that dictates how much a company can charge for channels beyond basic service. But the commission will not take any action until it gets subscriber complaints.

By extending the freeze, the FCC is trying to maintain

a stable pricing situation until local communities are prepared to enforce the law.

Many questions have surfaced since cable companies announced billing changes in September to comply with the new cable law.

Variations in channel packaging and equipment charges caused individual bills to go up or down, but the freeze prohibited companies from collecting any more in overall revenue than they had six months earlier.

Consumers who believe the changes caused excessive charges for cable channels beyond the basic package can generate FCC action against the company by filing a complaint with the commission.

The National Cable Television Association, meanwhile, has chafed under the revenue freeze, with officials estimating that it has cost the industry \$2 billion.

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