

Kline to push for controversial religious school vouchers

By [Andy Birkey](#) | 11.11.10 | 11:55 am

Republican Rep. John Kline is likely to chair the powerful House Education and Labor Committee in the new Congress and already he's drawing fire from both sides of the aisle. Kline caught praise from religious conservatives when he expressed his support for educational vouchers for Washington, DC, parents that will allow them to spend taxpayer money on religious schooling. But he also has drawn the ire of fiscal conservatives by saying he doesn't intend to push for the elimination of the Department of Education.

“Those who call for abolishing the Department of Education, that's simply not going to get done,” Kline told [Government Executive magazine](#). “It's not simply enough to say, ‘I'm only going to vote for abolishing the Department of Education.’”

That doesn't sit well with Tad DeHaven of the conservative Cato Institute. “Unfortunately, the party favored by tea party supporters at the moment has no interest in shuttering the DOE,” he wrote. At least [15 new members of Congress](#) — many tea party types — have vowed to push for elimination of DOE.

While Kline may be rubbing hardline fiscal conservatives the wrong way, he's gotten praise from hardline religious conservatives who are pushing for vouchers that would funnel taxpayer money religious schools in Washington, DC. President Obama let the five-year experimental voucher program expire last year.

“Congressman Kline is very focused on restoring the program,” spokeswoman Alexa Marrero told the Washington Times.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program allowed parents to take \$7,500 from the government and put it toward any school they liked. The goal was to see if educational attainment and student safety improved. [According to the Department of Education](#), neither improved.

In fact, one of the program's few benefits seems to be that it helps slow the rate of Catholic school closures. The Catholic hierarchy has vociferously argued for the voucher program as the number of Catholic schools in the nation drops each year.

“The children at Holy Redeemer were, unlike so many of their peers, on the path to college,” [wrote the administration of Notre Dame University](#) when the program expired in 2009. “So we were deeply saddened to learn that the impending termination of the OSP has put the school in an untenable situation, leading the pastor to conclude that the school must be closed.”

That has led Catholic education advocates to [push for vouchers to stave off school closings](#) — about 250 a year nationwide.

Separation of church and state watchdogs [say this is not a good idea](#).

“The ‘experiment’ was authorized for five years and has expired (although currently participating students are being allowed to continue their enrollment),” wrote Bob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. “It did nothing to boost student academic achievement, served mainly to prop up financially shaky religious schools at taxpayer expense and included private schools that hired uncertified teachers who lacked college degrees.”

He added, “Naturally, the new leadership in Congress wants to allocate a few million taxpayer dollars to revive it. (Where's that concern about cutting the federal budget that we keep hearing about?)”