

This year's budget crunch is not an anomaly. Messenger presented a glimpse of a budget picture for the next four years that points to a further decline in enrollment. Enrollment in Montana is directly linked to the amount of funding a district receives.

"It's not going to get any prettier," said trustee Brenda Nordlund.

Many trustees also had strong words for the Legislature, which they accused of not paying attention to the plight of many of the state's larger districts that are unable to legally raise additional funds.

"We're pushing hard against the ceiling and it's coming down on us," Messenger noted.

The district's difficulties—along with the hours spent poring over numbers and finances—brought at least one trustee to near tears at the board meeting.

"I find this a tremendously humbling experience," said trustee Julie Mitchell.

She added that she realizes the district must pare its expenses, but the task is unpleasant and unavoidable.

"In the end we have to decide and someone's going to be mad," she said.

But she admonished both the public and trustees to remember that the district delivers a quality education and will continue to do so, in spite of the financial crunch.

"There are some incredibly cool things going on . . . we give our kids a fantastic education."

Trustees also reminded the public that none of the proposed reductions have been decided and urged continued public input.

"This is not set in concrete," Trustee Rich Moy said.

A public hearing on the budget is set for March 16.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that time allocated to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) and the time allocated to me be reversed on the schedule.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from South Dakota?

There was no objection.

IDEA FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, today the House passed House Concurrent Resolution 84, which I think is important for a number of reasons. There is no higher priority, I believe, than our children's education.

I have a third grader and a fifth grader who attend Oscar Howell Elementary, the public school system in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in the Sioux Falls School District. The school board elec-

tion is coming up in June. There are no fewer than 12 people running for one position on the school board, and we will have the opportunity to choose a very qualified member of the school board. I am delighted to have that many people who are interested in seeking and holding that very important position.

The concurrent resolution that we passed today in the House was a non-binding resolution. But, nevertheless, I think is important, for several reasons. It compels the will of this House that special education be funded before any other new education initiatives are funded. That makes basic sense. The special education mandate, IDEA funding, is a Federal mandate and, therefore, should be federally funded.

Twenty years ago the Congress committed to fund special ed at 40 percent of the total funding level. We are not even close to that today, not even close. I am pleased that the Republican Congress in the last years has begun moving in that direction. In fact, we have backed up our rhetoric with our action.

If we look at where the President's budget has been in the last several budget years, in fiscal year 1997 the Republican Congress upped the President's request for IDEA funding for special ed by 19 percent. In 1998 we increased the funding level for special ed by 17 percent over the President's request. And in 1999 the Congress increased the level of spending over the President's request by 13 percent.

There is a pattern and a history and a commitment on the part of this Congress to see that the Federal Government honors the commitment that it has made to local school district across this country. So it is very important, I think, that this resolution expresses the will of the House that we will fully fund special ed and move in that direction.

The other thing I think is important with respect to this resolution is that whenever the Federal Government imposes mandates on local school districts and school boards, we take away and deprive them of critical decision-making authority.

I just mentioned that we have 12 people seeking the school board position for one position in the Sioux Falls School District. Using the resources that they have to fund the special ed mandate deprives them of using resources that could be allocated for other important things like building new schools, hiring new teachers, reducing class sizes, or buying more computers.

I will use my State of South Dakota as an example. If we were fully funding the mandate on special education today, we would be looking at an additional \$18 million coming into South Dakota. And if each State would look at their own statistics, I think they

would find similar types of relationships between the current funding levels and where it should be if the Federal Government was living up to the mandate.

As I said earlier, there is no higher priority than providing quality education to children with disabilities and at the same time freeing up resources that local decision-makers can use to improve the quality of education for all of our students across this country.

And so I believe that the vote that we made today in the House is important, as we move down that direction and look at what we can do to further increase the funding level, to honor the commitment that the Federal Government has made to the local school boards across this country, to see that those Federal mandates that we impose upon local school boards are fully funded so that our school districts and those decision-makers at the local level have an opportunity to do what they do best, and that is try and give our children the very best education possible.

And I again would simply say that, as a matter of principle, I believe that this Republican Congress is committed to seeing that more of that decision-making authority is retained at the local level and that our parents, our teachers, our administrators and our school boards are those who are in the best position to make decisions about the quality and the funding of our children's education. And that frankly, in my view, is where we ought to put the point of control.

And so the resolution that we acted upon today, I think, speaks loud and clear that this Congress will continue to move in the direction of seeing that the Federal mandate special education, which we have a responsibility for 40 percent of, that we continue to move in the direction, as we have here in the past few years in this Congress, to see that we honor that commitment to all of our students across this country and particularly to those who have disabilities.

I look forward to working toward that end and as we go through the appropriations process within the confines of a balanced budget agreement to see that that gets done.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 833, BANKRUPTCY REFORM ACT OF 1999

Mr. SESSIONS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 106-126) on the resolution (H. Res. 158) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 833) to amend title 11 of the United States Code, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.