

D.C. voucher proposal withdrawn_102003

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—For the time being, the Senate has halted a bill that would create a publicly funded school-voucher program in the District of Columbia.

On Sept. 30, Republican leaders withdrew from consideration the D.C. appropriations bill, which included the voucher provision. Although it had been debated in the Senate for several days, the bill's supporters reportedly were worried they didn't have enough votes to overcome a threatened Democratic filibuster.

A similar D.C. voucher provision already has passed the House on the thinnest of margins—209 to 208.

The bill would provide tax funding for scholarships that poor students could spend at any participating private school in the city—including religious schools.

If passed, it would be the first federally funded voucher program in the country, which opponents say would set a dangerous precedent. Congress rejected a nationwide voucher program last year.

Although the Supreme Court declared a statewide voucher program in Ohio did not violate the Constitution's ban on government support for religion, church-state separationist groups, along with many public-education

lobbying groups, still oppose vouchers.

During debate in the Senate, Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, the bill's chief sponsor, told his colleagues across the aisle that their opposition would do nothing to improve the status of the troubled Washington school system.

But voucher opponents said D.C. public schools are improving and that other education-reform models, such as public charter schools, are producing positive results in Washington.

The provision fell victim to the filibuster threats and the pressing nature of several other appropriations bills the Senate must consider soon—including President Bush's \$87 billion request for aid in Iraq.

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