

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Johnson Requests Review of *No Child Left Behind's* Effects on Rural Schools

*Washington, DC*—U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) today joined Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) in requesting a General Accounting Office (GAO) study on the unique challenges facing rural school districts as they implement President George W. Bush's education program *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

"The President has underfunded this program by nearly \$9 billion. We must find out if, in fact, this program can achieve its aims to improve education," said Johnson. "I have asked the accounting arm of Congress to look at how this legislation will affect rural states and provide a report. Does the one-size-fits-all approach to education work in New York City and Rapid City? We need to better understand if it works as well in practice as it looks on paper."

Johnson has met with educators and administrators in South Dakota to discuss challenges they see in implementing the legislation. He has stated the program—signed into law by President Bush in January 2002—needs to be revisited.

Rural states are particularly affected – most significantly challenged by the assessment and teacher requirements. As such, the study will focus on teacher recruiting and retention in rural communities.

In South Dakota, more than 48 percent of the state's population lives in rural areas and more than 77 percent of public schools are in rural areas. In those communities, there are generally fewer than 600 students attending a school with an average grade size of 19 students. The average rural teacher's salary in South Dakota is \$24,234, the lowest in the nation.

The Senate version of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill—the legislation that funds NCLB—is \$8.4 billion below the levels promised in the law. During consideration of the spending bill, Senate Republicans rejected moves to increase funding.

Further South Dakota-specific information is available at [http://www.ruraledu.org/streport/pdf/sd\\_2003.pdf](http://www.ruraledu.org/streport/pdf/sd_2003.pdf) and [http://www.ruraledu.org/streport/pdf/WRM\\_2003.pdf](http://www.ruraledu.org/streport/pdf/WRM_2003.pdf).

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\*\*\* Letter to GAO attached.

For more information, visit Senator Johnson's website at <http://johnson.senate.gov>  
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October 21, 2003

The Honorable David M. Walker  
Comptroller General  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

As you may know, in January 2002, Congress enacted major bipartisan education reform legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act. Congress wanted to address the significant educational achievement gap between disadvantaged students and those from more affluent families and communities by strengthening teacher quality and student achievement.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) ensures accountability through periodic student assessment as well as establishing professional development requirements for teachers to ensure that every classroom has a qualified instructor. To assist educators, state and local officials, and parents achieve these goals, Congress authorized significant increases in education funding, primarily targeted to the neediest students.

The requirements under NCLBA apply to all public schools; however, the challenges of implementing the assessment and teacher quality requirements for rural communities are unique. As you may be aware, according to a recent report entitled "Why Rural Matters 2003" by The Rural School and Community Trust, nearly one-third of U.S. school-aged children attend schools in rural communities or small towns with populations below 25,000. In South Dakota, more than 48 percent of the state's population lives in rural areas and more than 77 percent of public schools are in rural areas. In those communities, there are generally fewer than 600 students attending a school with an average grade size of 19 students. The average rural teacher's salary in South Dakota is \$24,234, the lowest in the nation.

While visiting with state and local education officials and educators from rural communities over the past year, many concerns have been raised regarding implementation of NCLBA, particularly the financial challenges that rural schools face in meeting the teacher quality and student assessment requirements. Educators and state and local school officials have cited declining populations in many South Dakota communities, lack of technology, limited sources of revenue, transportation costs, concerns with the highly qualified teacher requirements for educators teaching multiple core subjects, and the availability of supplemental services.

In view of these concerns, I am requesting the General Accounting Office (GAO) to undertake a study that would examine the challenges, particularly financial, that rural communities face as they attempt to comply with the requirements under No Child Left Behind Act. Among the questions that I hope the GAO will examine include:

\* What are the most significant challenges rural states and districts face in implementing the accountability provision of NCLBA?

\* What strategies have rural states and districts taken to implement the accountability provisions and what have been the outcomes of the different approaches?

\* Are there expenditures for compliance with NCLBA that are unique to rural school districts, e.g., transportation, supplemental services including distance learning opportunities, teacher pay, technology?

\* How will NCLBA programs such as REAP, education technology and teach quality enable rural school districts to meet these new requirements?

\* Are there expenditures that rural school districts may have to absorb that may not be authorized or provided under NCLBA?

\* Are existing sources of revenue adequate to permit smaller, rural school districts to meet NCLBA requirements, or will declining populations and limitations on state financial support impact the ability of rural schools to comply?

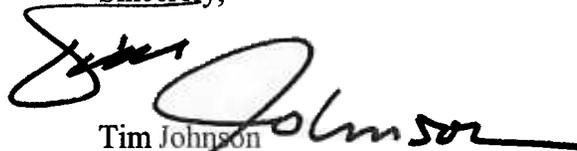
\* How does NCLBA affect the ability of smaller, rural schools to retain and hire teachers in rural communities? Are there incentives not included in NCLBA that should be considered?

\* What is the impact of NCLBA on rural schools serving significant populations of minorities, e.g., Native Americans? Are there funding challenges unique to these communities?

\* How is the Department of Education assisting rural states and districts address the accountability challenges of implementing NCLBA?

Thank you for examining these issues of critical importance to rural education communities. I look forward to your report.

Sincerely,



Tim Johnson  
United States Senate

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