



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

April 20, 2006

Stephen B. Martin
President
Washington Association of Educators of the Talented and Gifted
P.O. Box 336
Pe Ell, WA 98572

Dear President Martin,

I have recently received dozens of letters from Washington state children in support of gifted education. Nina Neff (Spokane, 9th grade) confessed that her peers wanted nothing to do with a "strange girl who reads walking down the hallways...I was miserable in my intellectual and social isolation." Everything changed for Nina when she tested into a gifted program. "School was *fun*," she writes, "For the first time in my life, school was stimulating [and] challenging." Nina goes on to tell me that the regular classroom does not meet her needs. Children like Nina appreciate special classes that challenge them. Nina is just one of millions of students who benefit from gifted classes, and America must continue to encourage, not limit, the curiosity of its children.

All children are entitled to an education that enables them to fully develop their skills. It is vital to ensure that the nearly three million students in the United States with exceptional academic talent are provided with a challenging education. Students should be given every opportunity to excel; children have unique sets of skills and abilities that need to be cultivated and continually challenged in order for students to realize their potential. If we fail to offer such students a curriculum that meets their needs, we run the risk of our most talented students losing interest in school and abandoning their education altogether.

With the continued increase in global competition America must nurture our youngest and brightest. Countries such as India and China are increasingly in competition with the United States and we must prepare our children for this global challenge. Without the support they need, the gifted and talented children of our great country will not have the foundation to become strong, international leaders and competitors. In order for us to combat the increased international competition, we need to lead by example.

President Bush has consistently requested cutting programs for gifted and talented children. Every year since taking office, the President has called for completely eliminating funding for Javits. And this year, once again, the President's budget calls for the elimination of the \$9 million Javits Program, which is the only federal program supporting K-12 gifted programs. In 2005, \$35.7 billion was spent on the No Child Left Behind Act, while only \$9.6 million is currently being spent on the education of talented and gifted children. If President Bush is serious about leaving no child behind, then he

cannot be selective with the population – gifted children also need the opportunity to achieve.

The Center for Gifted Education's research found that encouraging low-income gifted and talented students by providing resource assistance to them is critical to their success. In order to ensure that all advanced learners, no matter their ethnicity or circumstances, receive an appropriate education, it is crucial that we achieve change in identification and school programs. According to Stephen Martin, President of the Washington Association of Educators of the Talented and Gifted, most of the funding for gifted education derives from local taxes. If local communities are unwilling or unable to fund programs for their gifted children then it is the role of the federal government to assist in whatever way it can.

That is why I oppose Bush's budget and lend my support to federal education programs. During last year's budget debate, I voted with the Senate to reject President Bush's call for education cuts and voted to provide an extra \$5.4 billion for education programs. This year, one-third of Bush's proposed budget cuts come from education (42 programs), including the Javits Act. Again, Congress has rejected these cuts. The Senate agreed by a 73-27 vote to add \$7 billion for education and health programs in the Budget Resolution.

The Earth's resources are limited, but one unlimited resource we can continually tap is the creative spirit of our people. Our youth are our most precious resource. We need to support those students who are exceptional and on the road to becoming America's future leaders. I am deeply concerned with the precedent America is setting under the current Administration – we are telling our children that we expect them to succeed, yet we are mandating limitation. When it comes to our children's excellence in education there is no such thing as too much of a good thing. I will continue to fight for education and oppose any budget that does not treat education as a national priority.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator