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Appleby College Model United Nations Conference 2024

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U.S. Congress

Specialty Committee

Chair: Eric Wu

Co-chair: Neil Yang

Chair's Note & Introduction

Hello delegates. My name is Eric Wu, your chair for this committee, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the U.S. Congress committee for our 19th iteration of ACMUN. With politicians from both the Democratic and Republican Parties, this committee will emulate the evolving political sphere of the United States (with a few creative liberties, of course).

The very basis of democracy is to ensure equal representation and equal opportunity to shape the future of the nation, but it is far from perfect. American politics is sensationalized; it is volatile; and it is inflammatory; and as a reflection of its real-life institutions, this committee will be too. Thus, I must remind you to abide by the conference Code of Conduct—a copy of which has already been sent to you electronically, but will also be provided on the day of the event.

Our committee will take on a historical perspective as we analyze two pressing issues from the 2000s: education and drugs. Though this committee will be comprised of politicians both from the present-day and back then, it is important to be consistent with the timeline that this committee is situated in. Modern ideas and arguments may be utilized, but direct references

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to specific events, laws, or any information that would otherwise not be available during the year 2000 may not be used.

We look forward to welcoming you on campus, and fostering a respectful, creative and fun debate that will push your adaptivity, thinking, and oration skills as we delve into our two topics!

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TOPIC 1: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

1 Introduction

In 1965, the 89th United States Congress, encouraged by President Lyndon B. Johnson, passed one of the most far-reaching pieces of federal legislation affecting education into law: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which aimed to provide additional educational resources to low-income students (Frey et al., 2012). However, the nation continuously and repeatedly failed to achieve the law's goal of providing full education opportunities to its students. By 1983, fears surrounding the American education system had culminated with the release of a report titled, *A Nation at Risk*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education under the Reagan administration (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). The report garnered considerable media attention and suggested that unless increased academic standards and significant reforms were made towards the nation's education system, America's economic security would become substantially compromised.

Attention on the American education system only increased in 2000 when then-candidate George Bush made several campaign promises related to passing a bipartisan education reform. Bush's idea of a reformed education system focused on holding greater levels of accountability on schools that receive federal funding. Politically, however, many Republican groups have historically opposed the federal government playing an active role in public education (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). It was only through lobbying efforts, public opinion and other political developments (such as the Republican defeat in the 1996 presidential election) that led

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congressional Republicans to finally support and push for federal education reforms that focused on heavily on accountability and standardized testing.

Follow Bush's victory in the 2000 presidential election, the ESEA was reauthorized, and in part amended, by the 107th United States Congress with the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001). The act sought to promote a standards-based education, which would be reinforced through standardized testing. In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the bill faced expansive pushback from both Democrats, who appealed for greater funding, and Republicans, who continued to criticize the increased role of the federal government in education. Despite these challenges, the bill ultimately passed with bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. In early 2002, President Bush signed the act into law.

While the intentions of the NCLB were right, the practicality of it fell short of expectations. Over time, the act's test-based accountability system was seen as overly unrealistic and punitive (Layton, 2015), encouraging educators to focus more class time on testing practice rather than in-depth understanding of the subject matter. By 2015, bipartisan criticism had grown so extensively that the 114th bipartisan Congress replaced the NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act, shifting the federal government's provisions for accountability to individual states.

2 Committee Context

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This committee is based in the year 2000, so please make note of the contexts surrounding this discussion. Mainly, the following points are of importance:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is still currently in effect, and has not yet been succeeded;
- The report, *A National at Risk*, has already been published, and the American public is aware of the deficiencies in the current education system;
- Bush has not yet been elected, and the presidential election is scheduled for approximately 11 months from now.

Delegates may wish to conduct additional research into the context and historical viewpoints of the U.S. Congress during the 2000s.

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TOPIC 2: Examining the Relationship Between Legalization of Marijuana and Drug-Related Crime

1 Introduction

The Solomon–Lautenberg amendment was a U.S. federal law that encouraged states to suspend the driver's license of anyone who commits a drug offense (AP, 1990). The law, colloquially known as, “Smoke a joint, lose your license,” would impose a driver’s license of at least six months for committing any kind of drug-related offense, regardless of whether a motor vehicle was involved or not.

The amendment was named after its primary sponsors: Rep. Jerry Solomon (R-NY) and Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), and was signed into law as part of the 1991 Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (AP, 1990). While the law was discouraged drug use federally, it was up to the individual states to either enact the license suspension or opt-out of the act altogether. States that did not opt-out nor enact the license would incur a 5% yearly cut in highway funding during the 1994 and 1995 fiscal years, which later increased to 10% each year thereafter.

In order to opt out, state legislation must pass a resolution that declared its opposition to the suspension policy (Revocation or Suspension of Drivers’ Licenses of Individuals Convicted of Drug Offenses, 1990). The governor of the state must then send a written certificate to the Secretary of Transportation which states that the resolution has been approved, and that the governor themselves too is opposed to the policy. An official of the George H. W. Bush

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administration explains the reasoning behind this opt-out procedure, saying, “This forces the states to be accountable. We're not going to force you, but if you don't want to do it, you'll have to be public about it” (AP, 1990).

Though the bill received little attention during its passage, the law was widely criticized upon its enactment. Groups such as the National Governors Association and the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws have opposed the law for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that the punishment has nothing to do with the crime, the excess severity of the punishment and its disproportionate impact on minorities and low-income communities. In defense of their bill, Rep. Solomon stated, “Yes, we should do everything possible to interdict drugs coming into the country. Yes, we should provide adequate funds to treat addicts. And yes, we should jail – and in some cases even execute – those involved in the sale of drugs in this country. [...] But let's not kid ourselves. That is not enough. [...] Taking away driver's licenses in an automobile-oriented society will show that we are serious” (Mock, 2018). Similarly, Senator Lautenberg reasoned, “The threat of losing driving privileges will give many prospective drug users a strong reason to think twice – particularly young people. ... It is an excuse for young teenagers to say no to drugs, an excuse to say, ‘No thanks, I'd rather preserve my driving privilege’” (Segelbaum, 2018).

Today, three states have still not opted-out of the Solomon-Lautenberg amendment: Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida.

2 Committee Context

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This committee is based in the year 2000, so please make note of the contexts surrounding this discussion. Mainly, the following points are of importance:

- As of 2000, there are 15 states (in addition to the aforementioned three) that have enacted the “Smoke a joint, lose your license” law. These are: Wisconsin, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Indiana, Delaware, Georgia, Massachusetts, Ohio, Iowa, Pennsylvania, New York, Mississippi, New Jersey, Virginia and Texas.
 - It may be worth noting that California only opted-out in 1999—a year before this committee takes place.

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