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Pro-gay teaching imperils funds

Senate vote sends schools a message

By Carol Innerst
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Senate last night voted 63-36 to cut off federal funds to any school district that teaches acceptance of homosexual lifestyles.

Twenty-three Democrats joined 40 Republicans to pass the proposal put forth by Sen. Robert C. Smith, New Hampshire Republican, and Sen. Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican.

Mr. Smith said school districts use the money to buy books and other materials that are "so graphic and so disgusting that I can't display them here on the floor of the United States Senate."

Tom Hodson, Mr. Smith's legislative director, said, "A number of parents from New Hampshire and elsewhere brought materials to the senator's office that their children had received in schools, and when he read the materials he decided he had to do something about it."

Some of the material was aimed at 3- to 8-year-olds, he said.

The House included a similar amendment when it passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Differences between the two versions will have to be worked out by a conference committee before the bill can be signed into law by President Clinton. A House challenge is expected, and House-Senate conferees could eliminate it altogether.

Mary Cummins, a member of School Board 24, in the New York City borough of Queens, cheered the proposal's passage. "If a child is taught every day about the acceptability of homosexuality, that violates the child's First Amendment Rights," she said. "I will teach tolerance of everybody, not acceptance of everybody."

Mrs. Cummins was president of the school board when New York Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez tried to force the schools to teach elementary schoolchildren to accept homosexual lifestyles through two books, "Heather Has Two Mommies" and "Daddy's Roommate," which depict female and male homosexual couples in family settings with children.

She refused to teach the curriculum. The ensuing row led to the firing of Mr. Fernandez as chancellor of the nation's largest school district and helped fuel support for the bill.

The bill also signaled a rebellion against "President Clinton's idea of comprehensive health education as promoted by [Surgeon General] Joycelyn Elders," said John Mashburn, an aide to Mr. Helms. He said there's "lots going on un-

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basis. It would permit the Department of Education to approve as many as 10 such programs nationwide and provide \$1 million for grants and other costs.

The proposal "simply opens up a possibility," said Mr. Danforth, whose four daughters and one son all attended same-sex schools. He said studies show that girls and black boys who attend such schools fare better on standardized tests than their counterparts in coeducational settings.

He suggested a demonstration project to minimize opposition.

• This article is based in part on wire service reports.

schoolchildren in this country every day." Some books used in HIV-AIDS education programs describe sexual acts and advocate the use of latex condoms.

Sen. Paul Wellstone, Minnesota Democrat, said the provision is "very mean-spirited" because it would forbid counseling of gay students, who he said are up to three times as likely to commit suicide as other teen-agers. "We simply can't do that," he said.

The Senate also voted 66-33 to approve a proposal by Sen. John C. Danforth, Missouri Republican, that would allow all-boy or all-girl public schools on an experimental

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides \$12.5 billion in federal funds to the nation's public schools. Only 3 Republicans and 33 Democrats opposed the measure.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat and chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, said the proposal would involve the federal government in local decision-making and "remove the local discretion that is the hallmark of our educational system."

Mr. Helms denounced what he called the "disgusting, obscene material that's laid out before

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der AIDS education."

The measure would cut federal aid to districts that "carry out a program or activity that has either the purpose or effect of encouraging or supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative." That includes distribution of instructional materials, counseling and referral of students to homosexual organizations.

The Senate's vote came during debate on reauthorization of the