

Obama coaxes states to change with school dollars

By LIBBY QUAID
AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON — Using stimulus dollars as bait, President Obama is coaxing states to rewrite education laws and cut deals with unions as they compete for \$5 billion in school reform grants, the most money a president has ever had for overhauling schools. And it may end up going to only a few states.

In Wisconsin, where Obama planned to visit today, lawmakers are poised to change a law to boost their state's chances. Nine other states have taken similar steps.

And states can't even apply for the money yet.

"There is an appetite out there for change," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"There's been really dramatic movement in a number of states," said Duncan, who will travel to Madison, Wis., with the president. "This was the goal, but we didn't know if anyone was going to respond."

Respond they have. Wisconsin lawmakers planned to vote Thursday to lift a ban on using student test scores to judge teachers. That helps clear the way for an Obama priority, teacher pay tied to student performance.

California lifted a similar ban last month. And before that, charter school restrictions or budget cuts were eased in eight states — Louisiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Delaware, Indiana, Ohio, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Duncan repeatedly had warned such restrictions would hurt a state's chances at the money. The administration can't really tell states and schools what to do, since education has been largely a state and local responsibility throughout the history of the U.S.

But Obama has considerable leverage in his nearly \$5 billion com-

The administration can't directly tell states and schools what to do, however, since education has been largely a state and local responsibility throughout the history of the U.S.

petitive grant fund, dubbed the "Race to the Top," that was set aside in the economic stimulus law.

"If you put a very large, \$5 billion program in front of the entire country, everyone eyes that as an opportunity," said Wisconsin state Sen. John Lehman, a Democrat who chairs the state's Senate Education Committee and a former high school teacher.

No president has ever had that much money for schools at his discretion. Only Duncan — not Congress — has control over who gets it. And only some states, perhaps 10 to 20, will actually get the money.

Obama will use the trip to Wisconsin to call attention to the actions states are taking, one year after his election, to put his vision of reform in place, Melody Barnes, Obama's domestic policy director, told reporters Tuesday on a conference call.

Obama sees the test score data and charter schools, which are publicly funded but independent of local school boards, as solutions to the problems that plague public education.

The national teachers' unions disagree. They say student achievement is much more than a score on a standardized test and that it's a mistake to rely so heavily on charter schools.

"Despite growing evidence to the contrary, it appears the admin-

istration has decided that charter schools are the only answer to what ails America's public schools," the National Education Association, the largest teachers' union, said in comments submitted to the Education Department.

The NEA added: "We should not continue the unhealthy focus on standardized tests as the primary evidence of student success."

At the state level, unions have made deals with lawmakers on test scores. In Wisconsin, the state teachers' union agreed that test scores could be used to evaluate teachers — as long as they couldn't be used to fire or discipline teachers.

Teachers' unions are an influential segment of Obama's Democratic base. Obama is encouraging states to get their support. The Education Department says a state can win extra points in the "Race to the Top" if unions support their efforts.

The Wisconsin agreement is only half a loaf, said Amy Wilkins, a lobbyist for Education Trust, a children's advocacy group.

"There are lots of ways to use the data aside from firing and discipline," Wilkins said. "That said, unless you figure out a fair but fast way to remove truly incompetent teachers from classrooms, they're going to continue to be cycled into the highest poverty schools."

Charter schools and test scores fit into four broad goals Obama wants states to pursue — tougher academic standards, better ways to recruit and keep effective teachers, a method of tracking student performance and a plan of action to turn around failing schools.

A state will have to meet a series of conditions to earn points and boost its chances. Applications will be available this month, and the first round of grants will be awarded early next year.

National News

White House says no flu vaccine headed for Guantanamo detainees

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House says detainees at Guantanamo Bay are not yet receiving vaccinations against the swine flu.

Robert Gibbs said Tuesday concern that terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval base in Cuba were receiving vaccines was misplaced. Gibbs says no vaccines are at the naval base and none are on the way. A spokesman for the U.S. jail facility a day earlier said guards and then inmates were scheduled for inoculations. Critics were fast to object, saying U.S. civilians were waiting for vaccines while suspected terrorists were being given injections.

Army Maj. James Crabtree said Monday that doses should start arriving this month and medical personnel requested the doses. He said detainees will be vaccinated "entirely on a voluntary basis."

D.C. sniper asks Supreme Court to block execution for 2002 attacks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorneys for John Allen Muhammad, mastermind of the 2002 sniper attacks in the Washington, D.C., area that left 10 dead, asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday to stop his execution.

The 48-year-old Muhammad is scheduled to die by injection Tuesday at a Virginia prison. In court papers, his attorneys say the execution should be put off while the court considers whether his trial lawyer was ineffective.

Muhammad was convicted of killing Dean Harold Meyers at a Manassas, Va., gas station during a three-week spree in October 2002 that spanned Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Muhammad and his teenage accomplice, Lee Boyd Malvo, were also suspected of fatal shootings in other states, including Louisiana and Alabama. Malvo is serving a life sentence.

Muhammad's lawyers also have asked Virginia Gov. Timothy M. Kaine for clemency, saying Muhammad is mentally ill and should not be executed.

Disney says company to spend \$7M on conservation projects

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seeking to help fight climate change, the Walt Disney Co. says it will spend \$7 million in partnership with three conservation groups to protect tens of thousands of acres of forest lands in the Congo basin, the Amazon basin and in two regions of the United States.

The projects announced Tuesday are designed to work with local communities to either plant trees or set aside forest lands for protection against logging.

In partnership with Conservation International, Disney is providing \$4 million for forest protection projects at two reserves in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and for a forest program in the Amazon basin area of Peru.

The company also said it will work with the Nature Conservancy and provide \$2 million for tree planting on 2,000 acres of former forest lands in the lower Mississippi Valley, and \$1 million for the Conservation Fund's forest protection project along California's North Coast.

Peter Seligmann, chairman of Conservation International, said the Disney commitment "represents the largest single corporate contribution ever made to reduce (greenhouse) emissions from deforestation."

NEWCOMERS: Couple settles in to life in Ottawa

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FINDING OTTAWA

Fahnestock grew up near Butler, Mo. He retired from a career with the U.S. Navy that took him all over the world. He went back to school for a degree in social work and worked for the Veterans Hospital in Leavenworth. Eventually, he ended up in Hawaii and then California.

After retiring in 2005, Fahnestock wanted to return to a small community.

"California is a nice place, but it's very crowded for a country boy like me," Fahnestock said.

They discovered Ottawa while driving around eastern Kansas near Lawrence.

The town struck them both immediately, they said.

They were drawn to historic downtown Ottawa, especially because it was a Main Street city. Benicia, Calif., where they previously lived, also was a Main Street city and the couple knew that meant Ottawa was invested in its downtown.

Its proximity to Kansas City and Lawrence also was a big draw, especially for Fleet. She's a physician and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. Lawrence

reminds her of Berkeley. Fahnestock, who earned his master's degree in social work at the University of Kansas, also is familiar with Lawrence.

They fell in love with an Ottawa property. Just outside the Ottawa city limits in the 2600 block of Louisiana Road, the house and 10 acres features breathtaking views and gives their two dogs plenty of room to run.

"This place just felt right," Fahnestock said.

WELCOME HOME

Fahnestock and Fleet moved to Ottawa Sept. 7, although they purchased the property more than two years ago.

They moved in on a Monday and, on Wednesday night, visited the Potter's Wheel Coffeehouse, 205 S. Main St. Fahnestock, a musician, sat down with other local musicians during an open bluegrass jam session.

"I met this monster guitar player, Larry Lintner," Fahnestock said. "I've been having a really good time playing with Larry on Wednesday nights."

The couple also joined a church and spent quite a bit of time at the Ottawa Library. Soon, they met many people in Ottawa.

Fleet admitted she was concerned she wouldn't fit in with conservative Midwestern folks, but found a warm welcome even from people with different political beliefs and backgrounds.

"People have been much more welcoming and open than I expected," she said. "I didn't

think I'd fit in so quickly."

Both said they have enjoyed living in Ottawa more than they anticipated.

"I knew I would like it, but I didn't know I would like it this much," Fahnestock said. "It's much more beautiful, much more peaceful. I'm very happy here."

VANDALS: Businesses hit

(Continued from Page 1)

the public's help in identifying the person or people responsible for the damage.

The damaged businesses include:

- KFC, 2121 S. Princeton St.
- Payday Advance, 1532 S. Main St.
- Gerken Rent-All, 120 E. 15th St.
- Gollier Rehabilitation Center, 901 S. Main St.
- The Ottawa Herald, 104 S. Cedar St.
- Kansas Gas Service, 1300 E. Logan St.

- Mitchells Floor Coverings, 115 W. Third St.
- Pay Day Advance, 112 N. Main St.
- Cash 2 Go, 104 E. Logan St.
- Turner Flowers, 231 S. Main St.
- Ransom Memorial Hospital, 1301 S. Main St.

Police ask anyone with information about this crime to call the Ottawa Police Department at (785) 242-2561 or Franklin County Crime Stoppers at (888) 311-8477. If your information leads to an arrest, you may be eligible for a reward.

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