
THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Assignment Prompt Sheet

National Defense Education Act of 1958

Overview

Act Title: National Defense Education Act of 1958

Congress: 85th Congress (1957-1958)

Session/Sessions: 2

Statute No: 72 Stat. 1580-1605

Public Law No: 85 PL 864

Eid: 850864

Gid: 213-022

Bill: HR 13247

Sponsor: [Rep. Carl Atwood Elliott \(D-AL\)](#)

House Committees: Education and Labor

Senate Committees: Labor and Public Welfare

Companion Bill: S 4237

Related Bills: SJR 48; HR 95; S 1237; S 1727; S 2505; S 2622; S 2917; S 3156; S 3157; S 3163; S 3187; S 3352; HR 4490; HR 5030; HR 5479; HR 5763; HR 6212; HR 8294; HR 8395; HR 8571; HR 9413; HR 9506; HR 9577; HR 9635; HR 10278; HR 10381; HR 11261; HR 11776; HR 1

House Rules: Hres 675; Hres 691

Past Bills: 84 HR 11414; 84 HR 7535

Introduced Date- Law Date: July 1, 1958-August 23, 1958

House Floor Days: 4

Senate Floor Days: 3

Roll Call Votes: 9 (2 in the House, 5 in the Senate on HR 13247; 1 on Hres 675; 1 on Hres 691)



(Above) Sen. J. Lister Hill (D-AL), the Senate bill sponsor.

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Legislative History Comments

Passed in 1958, the National Defense Education Act (“NDEA”) “authorized the first federal student loan program; provided funds to states for science, mathematics, and modern foreign language instruction; and authorized grants to states for programs to identify and encourage gifted students ([CRS 2018](#), 23).” The bill amounted to “a seven-year, \$1 billion program of loans and grants to the Nation’s students and schools ([CQ Almanac 1958](#)).” The measure was one of the rare successes for advocates who argued for a more pronounced federal role in education policy.¹ Most claim the NDEA was passed in response to the Soviet launch of the satellite Sputnik.

The Voting Rights Extension of 1982 was considered a landmark act by Stathis (2003, 2014), Mayhew (1991, 2005) and was ranked as the most influential enactment of the 85th Congress (1957-1958) by Clinton and Lapinski (2006). In a 2005 article about ten important landmark bill, [Roll Call \(2005\)](#) argued the NDEA’s “stated focus on boosting achievement in science and mathematics helped enhance the nation’s intellectual capital, laying the groundwork for decades of American innovation in science and technology and, in turn, providing a basis for economic growth, military superiority and world leadership.”

From a process standpoint, this should be a manageable law. The House considered HR 13247 under an open rule. After two days of debate, the bill passes via voice vote. There is a Powell Amendment during this section that’s pretty interesting and worth some attention. The Senate debated and amended their bill, S 4237 before inserting the text into HR 13247 and passing it [62-26](#). Take a look at both the McNamara and Cooper amendments.

The House then adopted Hres 691 which led to a conference with the Senate. This section is going to be just a couple of paragraphs. Conference consideration looks pretty straight-forward as well. The Senate passing the bill with the scholarship component and the House not doing so appears to be the big difference between the two. The Senate passed the conference report 66-15 and the House [212-85](#). You’ll note student number three has drawn three sections, but they’re all going to be quite short.

In addition to the pieces linked above, please don’t hesitate to contact me with questions!

¹ CQ Almanac (1958) dubbed it the “first time [Congress] endorsed the principle of a Federal contribution toward general education.”

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Assignments

For the sections below, you're going to want to answer the questions and write-up the process sections that correspond to your assigned number. Here they are:

#1.

#2.

#3.

Background Questions

1. What does this act actually do? Who was pushing for it? Was it significantly altered during consideration? What did existing federal policy look like in this specific issue area? Why did reformers feel it needed to be changed?

Specifically, with this question, provide some background on federal education funding. Why was it so difficult to enact legislation providing federal funding to K-12 schools? CQ Almanac has a number of useful pieces on this. See my comment above for additional information and links.

2. Discuss the broader political context this bill was considered in. Who controlled the House? The Senate? By how many? Who was President? Was this part of the President's agenda? What other pieces of legislation were being considered/passed in this Congress?

Additionally, what was the Powell Amendment? Why was it so controversial? See my comment above for additional information and links.

The Stathis (2014) piece might worth a citation here.

3. What motivated consideration of this legislation in this specific Congress? Was it in response to a specific event? Or was this a slower build over time? What was the Cold War? This measure is frequently described as being passed in response to the Sputnik launch. Is that the case?

You might want to contextualize this bill by discussing some of the other landmark laws relating to this issue.

Commented [AJM1]: The federal government has provided some form of federal aid to universities since the middle of the 19th century. Concern over illiteracy levels highlighted by the World War I draft led to a push for federal aid to elementary and secondary education (see Graham 2011; [CQ Almanac 1946](#)). While numerous bills were introduced on this subject in the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until 1943, during the 78th Congress, that an elementary and secondary education bill reached the floor of either chamber. The bill, S. 637, sought to provide \$300,000,000 in school aid. However, the Senate adopted an amendment by Senator William Langer (R-ND) that barred those receiving federal funds from discriminating on account of race. Press accounts suggest the amendment was offered strategically, noting that it was opposed by the NAACP and that “[a] number of Senators who voted for [it] promptly turned round and voted to have the legislation as a whole recommitted to the Committee on Education and Labor (“Legislative Sabotage,” *Washington Post*, October 22, 1943). This amendment led to defections from Southerners and the Senate eventually killed S. 637 via a motion to recommit on a 60-30 vote (see [voteview rnum 98](#); Trussell, C. P. 1943. “Southerners Kill School Aid Bill as Discrimination Bar Is Adopted,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1943).

In the 79th Congress (1945-1946), the Senate considered a number of bills related to federal aid for elementary and secondary education (S 181; S 717; S 2207; S 2499). While a number of hearings on the legislation was held in the Education and Labor committee, none of these bills were considered on the chamber floor. The 80th Congress (1947-1948) saw more progress. Once again, the Senate considered a federal aid bill on the floor. This time the measure, S. 472, was adopted by a 58-22 vote after a fairly lengthy floor debate (see [voteview rnum 169](#); White, William. 1948. “Education Aid Bill Passed by Senate.” *New York Times*, October 21, 1943.) The \$300 million dollar Senate bill barred federal aid to private schools and included an amendment adopted by voice vote by Senator Tom Connally (D-TX) that prohibited “any limitations in future appropriation bills on the use of Federal aid to education funds ([CQ Almanac 1948](#)).” The Senate bill then died in the House Committee on Education and Labor.

The Senate passed a comparable bill, S. 246, at the start of the 81st Congress (1949-1950) (see [voteview rnum 124](#)). However, the House bill, HR 4643, was not reported out of the Committee on Education and Labor. [CQ Almanac \(1949\)](#) reported that “[t]he major difference between the Senate-passed S 246 and HR 4643 introduced in the House was on aid to private and parochial schools.” The 81st Congress did see the enactment of two related, but less comprehensive bills: S 2317 (81 PL 815), which “provided for federal surveys of proposed school facilities, and for emergency school construction in overburdened area” and HR 7940 (81 PL 874), which “authorized annual federal aid to school districts financially burdened because federal installations ...

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Process Sections

Please write-up the sections that correspond to your number. Feel free to incorporate any notes I might have dumped in the margins.

#1. House Consideration of HR 13247 (August 7-8, 1958)

Considered under Hres 675, an open rule. Rule passes by a [266-108](#) vote.

CQ Almanac (1958) lists the vote on the motion to recommit offered by Rep. Ralph Gwinn (R-NY) as the key vote. There is also controversy over a Rep. Adam Clayton Powell (D-NY) amendment (“Powell Amendment”).

Bizarrely, I believe a request for a recorded vote on HR 13247 by Rep. August Johansen (R-MI) was rejected on the grounds a sufficient second was not present.

#2. Senate Consideration of S 4237 & HR 13247 (August 12-13, 1958)

Senate bill is sponsored by Sen. [Lister Hill \(D-AL\)](#).

The key in the Senate was an amendment offered by Sen. Patrick McNamara (D-MI) which would have provided 1 billion for public school grants. It was defeated [30-61](#).

Additionally, an amendment by Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-KY) that substantially cut the number of national defense scholarships proved controversial and was adopted by a narrow 46-42 vote.

HR 13247 is amended and passed the Senate [62-26](#).

#3. House Consideration of Hres 691 & the Senate Amendments to HR 13247 (August 19, 1958)

Rep. Howard “Judge” Smith (D-VA) called up Hres 691, which would request a conference with the Senate on HR 13247.

After a short debate, Hres 691 passes 259-110.

#3. Senate Consideration of the Conference Report on HR 13247 (August 22, 1958)

#3. House Consideration of the Conference Report on HR 18583 (August 23, 1958)

HR 13247 passes the House [212-85](#).

Commented [AJM2]: A bit odd to see a roll call on an open rule in 1958.

Commented [AJM3]: The key to consideration in the House appears to be navigating the Powell amendment. Rose (2016) has a nice discussion of it. Powell offered his amendment and it was adopted by voice. Rep. Walter Judd (R-MN) later offered an amendment striking the scholarship section (which Powell’s amendment applied to). It passed 109-78 either by division or teller. It’s really interesting they didn’t force a roll call on Judd’s amendment after the cotw rose. I’m guessing a deal was reached behind the scenes. See Rose (2016) and historical newspapers for more.

Commented [AJM4]: So the Senate passing the bill with the scholarship component and the House not doing so appears to be the big difference between the two. Again, I’m not sure how the Powell amendment plays here. I would have guessed there’d be a bigger stink about the scholarship component being dropped.

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Member Spotlight

Choose one of the following for your member spotlight:

#1. Rep. Adam Clayton Powell (D-NY); Rep. Walter Judd (R-MN); Rep. Ralph Gwinn (R-NY); Rep. Carroll Kearns (R-PA); Rep. Sam Rayburn (D-TX)

#2. Sen. J. Lister Hill (D-AL); Sen. Patrick McNamara (D-MI); Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-KY); Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ); Sen. Wayne Morse (D-OR)

#3. Rep. Edith Green (D-OR); Rep. Howard Smith (D-VA); Rep. Carl Atwood Elliott (D-AL); Sen. Lyndon Johnson (D-TX); Rep. Joseph Martin (R-MA); Sen. Strom Thurmond (D-SC)

Aftermath Questions

1. How was this act viewed upon passage? What did the newspapers say? How did the final measure differ from the one reformers were pushing? Was there any question the President would sign it?

What happened with Powell's amendment moving forward? Did it become policy on most education-related measures?

2. How has this law evolved over time? Has it been featured in any major Supreme Court cases? Significantly altered by subsequent legislation?

Additionally, how relevant is this law currently? Are there additional issues related to it that reformers have been pushing to change? For example, you could connect this law to the contemporary debate over student debt (see e.g. [NPR 2020](#)).

3. How has this act been viewed by scholars? Did it achieve its stated goals? What impact did it have on the Cold War? How did the Cold War evolve after its passage?

Do scholars highlight any major limitations? Are there aspects of the bill that are viewed more favorably than others? Discuss the relevance of this act as it pertains to contemporary policy.

Commented [AJM5]: Few House members were as well-known and influential as Powell.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1972/04/05/archives/a-man-of-many-roles-adam-clayton-powell-former-harlem.html>

Commented [AJM6]: Sen. J. Lister Hill (D-AL), the Senate bill sponsor was an interesting political figure. Like most southerners, Hill was a civil rights opponent. Unlike most southerners, he was described as being fiercely "progressive" and known for sponsoring "some of most important health and education legislation in the years after World War II ([New York Times 1984](#))."

Commented [AJM7]: Green was dubbed by former Senator Mark Hatfield "the most powerful woman ever to serve in the U.S. Congress."

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Suggested Sources

Scholarly Articles:

- Flemming, A. S. (1960). The philosophy and objectives of the National Defense Education Act. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 327(1), 132-138.
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- Clinton, Joshua and John Lapinski. 2006. "Measuring Legislative Accomplishment, 1877-1994," *American Journal of Political Science* 50(1): 232-249.
- Stathis, Stephen W. 2014. *Landmark Legislation, 1774-2012: Major U.S. Acts and Treaties, 2nd Edition*. Washington: CQ Press.
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- Strickland, C. E. (1985). Sputnik reform revisited. *Educational Studies*, 16(1), 15-21.
- Wissehr, C., Concannon, J., & Barrow, L. H. (2011). Looking back at the Sputnik era and its impact on science education. *School Science and Mathematics*, 111(7), 368-375.
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THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Harris, Mary M., and James R. Miller. "Needed: Reincarnation of national defense education act of 1958." *Journal of Science Education and Technology* 14.2 (2005): 157-171.

Kessinger, Thomas A. "Efforts toward educational reform in the United States since 1958: A review of seven major initiatives." *American Educational History Journal* 38.1/2 (2011): 263.

Newspaper Pieces:

- <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/02/this-day-in-politics-sept-2-1958-801912>
- <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14829195>
- <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14841107>
- <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/technology/552248-now-is-the-time-for-a-new-national-defense-education-act>
- https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Sputnik_Spurs_Passage_of_National_Defense_Education_Act.htm
- <https://www.rollcall.com/2005/05/02/ten-bills-that-really-mattered/>
- <https://www.vox.com/2015/4/11/8389923/esea-nclb-johnson-great-society>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/01/22/even-forgiving-student-loans-wont-solve-higher-education-funding-crisis/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/05/policymakers-created-student-loan-industry-debt-crisis/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/05/03/seventy-five-years-reforms-have-failed-fix-our-college-financial-aid-system/>
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- <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/11/the-federal-student-aid-program-is-breaking-its-promise-to-the-poor/281823/>
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- <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/04/05/archives/a-man-of-many-roles-adam-clayton-powell-former-harlem.html>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/11/model-new-cadre-black-congresspeople-trying-change-politics/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1993/03/14/the-prince-of-harlem/522b80b0-2b1e-46cc-8f20-cf861728ce27/>