

‘OUR SCHOOLS, OUR FUTURE’

Loebsack kicks off education tour at CHS

BY BRENDEN WEST

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CLINTON – By trade, U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack, D-Iowa, was a professor at Cornell College before he dabbled in politics. Before that, he obtained a PhD in education. His wife, Terry, also taught for 35 years.

At the very least, Loebsack has spent time in the classroom, a reason he feels the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education House Subcommittee is a good fit for what he brings to Congress. However, on Monday he chose to share his experience as an impoverished student – not successful teacher – with educators and elected officials, State Rep. Mary Wolfe and Sen. Rita Hart among them.

“I would not be here if it weren’t for that education,” Loebsack said.

“I decided in the fourth grade that I’m fed up with this (a life of poverty).

I’m not going to be poor when I’m an adult, and I have some control over that.” As the ranking member of the subcommittee, Loebsack listed reforming the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“No Child Left Behind”) among his top priorities.

During his visit to Clinton High School, kicking off his “Our Schools, Our Future” tour, Loebsack said he understands the role education serves for the impoverished having been there himself.

The child of a single mom with a mental illness, Loebsack said he went through three different elementary schools in the fourth grade. He explained he could have been a “lost child” the way the system has failed other children. Instead, he knew education was his ticket to a better life.

Clinton School District Superintendent Deb Olson pointed to poverty as the number one inhibitor in education. While she agreed with the standards based concepts of NCLB, Olson said the program has inhibited what Iowa schools in particular are trying to do. With no hope of waiving the program, reformation seems the best alternative.

“The only way for children to get out of poverty is through education,” Olson said. “I don’t have any problems with the concept behind No Child Left Behind... but it presented some challenges.” Loebsack is the second government official to speak within the CHS innovation labs this month. As with Iowa Lt. Gov.

Kim Reynolds' recent tour of the school, educators pointed to the room around them for ideas of growth.

Wes Golden, a physics teacher in the district, said CHS hopes to equip its grads with attractive workplace skills, such as collaboration and creativity.

"The primary focus is the skill, even if education is the vehicle," he added.

The hour-long discussion touched on a number of topics: mental health provisions in schools, the role of education in the world economy, feedback about CORE education.

The topics continually returned to No Child Left Behind and what Loeb sack hopes to accomplish. The congressman lamented that in an election year, little in the way of policy-making will come from Washington this year. Loeb sack also was c critical of colleagues on the Hill who have made education "a partisan issue." He sited all-time low Congressional approval ratings.

Without taking sides, another at the table agreed.

"We've all been concerned that there were many non-educators making educational decisions, " said Julie Wolbers, a Washington Middle School teacher with over 30 years of experience.

"We're taking the population that cannot necessarily speak for themselves and we're punishing them. We need you to make the right decisions because we try to make the right decisions every day." Loeb sack assured her that he's hoping to use the feedback to give educators some more voice, with a coming together of the House and Senate, Democrats and Republicans.



U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack (middle) shakes hands with Clinton School District Curriculum Director John Jorgenson at the start of his “Our Schools, Our Future” session with educators and legislators Monday morning.