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March 10, 2008

Honorable David Obey, Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Room 2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey:

Your decision to dramatically reduce the funding of the Reading First program has negatively impacted millions of disadvantaged school children. In cutting this appropriation, you disregarded evidence from independent sources, including the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Center on Education Policy, that this program was making a difference and effectively helping our neediest students learn how to read.

Your claims that you were protecting funds from mismanagement do not ring true. The Department of Education had accepted every one of the Inspector General's recommendations several months before you proposed this terrible reduction.

But Dr. Robert Slavin remained dissatisfied with those steps and publicly stated that the program's funding should be cut. And of course he was dissatisfied, because his Success for All program did not receive as much funding from the Reading First program as he thought it should. But that's because of a range of forces, not because there was a Department of Education conspiracy against his program, as he has alleged.

In a piece on National Public Radio in July 2007, Dr. Slavin joined you in calling for the program to be cut. Unfortunately, the piece did not make reference to your long association with Dr. Slavin. As one of the original sponsors of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (commonly known as the Obey-Porter Act), you authorized a program – through the appropriations committee – for which Dr. Slavin's program was a primary beneficiary. You subsequently sponsored numerous research initiatives related to the Comprehensive School Reform program that also benefited Dr. Slavin. And it appears that when Dr. Slavin remained displeased

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that schools were not selecting his program through Reading First, you assisted him once again.

It is important for the public to know the true reasons that you proposed such a savage reduction in perhaps the only successful No Child Left Behind program. For that reason, I urge you to disclose the full extent of your association with Dr. Slavin, including correspondence or conversations you had with him about the Reading First program and its funding. I ask that you make public any emails between yourself and/or your staff and Dr. Slavin and/or his staff related to Reading First, as well as provide a list of meetings and/or telephone calls between yourself and/or your staff and Dr. Slavin and/or his staff. Furthermore, I suggest that you disclose whether you have ever received any campaign contributions or gifts from Dr. Slavin or his associates.

While you may not be legally required to release such information, you owe it to the public, and to the children impacted by the Reading First cuts, to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael J. Petrilli', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael J. Petrilli

V.P. for National Programs and Policy