



# The Phyllis Schlafly Report



VOL. 36, NO. 1

P.O. BOX 618, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002

AUGUST 2002

## NEA Conventioneers Continue their Mischief

The National Education Association (NEA) adopted several new goals at its annual convention held in Dallas over the long Fourth of July weekend. No, they don't have anything to do with improving schoolchildren's reading, writing or calculating skills.

The NEA's first and most important goal is to fight against any voucher plan, such as the Cleveland plan which was recently upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, and which the NEA now forecasts will be imitated in seven or eight other states. Criticizing the Court's ruling in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, NEA's outgoing president Bob Chase proclaimed in his keynote address: Just because the Court said vouchers are constitutional, "that does not make it right."

What's so bad about vouchers? Two reasons, according to Chase's platform histrionics. First, "it is driven by ideologues . . . not by teachers and other educators," and second, it rests on "the big lie . . . that public education has failed."

Voucher advocates must confess to the accuracy of the first charge: their movement is not driven by teachers but by parents and taxpayers. They are no more ideologues than NEA officials.

To support his claim that it's a "lie" to assert that public schools have failed, Chase cited a *Money* magazine report that 10% of public schools are as academically outstanding as the most prestigious private schools. For those who had fuzzy math and didn't learn how to subtract, that means 90% of public schools are **not** as good as private schools, which is why vouchers look attractive to so many parents.

It's clear that opposition to vouchers is the litmus test for election as an NEA official. Delegates listened to 17 candidates who were each given a couple of minutes to make their case, and most of them used their time allotment to denounce vouchers.

Chase's math is just as fuzzy when he talks about funding for public schools. He shouted in indignation that the President and Congress appropriated "trillions for tax cuts, overwhelmingly for the rich," plus billions

for the Pentagon, corporate bailouts and farmers, leaving "no new money left for public education." In fact, Congress authorized a record \$26.3 billion for public education in President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, plus "such sums as may be necessary" for ten specific programs. That's \$8 billion more than the last Clinton education bill.

The NEA carries on a vicious personal counterattack against parents who oppose NEA policies or candidates. The Convention passed New Business Item 5, which calls on the NEA to provide "ongoing strategic information to members and affiliates that increase member knowledge of the ongoing attacks designed to destroy NEA and its affiliates, limit educators' freedom of speech and their right to political participation." This information will include "identification and history of individuals and organizations that support the attacks and sources of funds that support these attack efforts," "status reports on tactics used by attack groups at the local, state, and national levels," and "status reports on responses by NEA and its affiliates to deal with the attacks." All this sounds ominously like a database on parents who object to NEA politicking or leftwing curricula.

In NEA newspeak, "attack groups" means groups of concerned parents, and "attacks designed to destroy NEA" means support for vouchers or tax credits. "Limit educators' freedom of speech" means parental efforts to opt their children out of courses promoting premarital sex, gay rights or anti-Christian multiculturalism, and limiting "their right to political participation" means objecting to teachers proselyting schoolchildren on behalf of the NEA's designated candidates, school tax increases and bond issues.

The NEA's Legislative Program for 2002 urges U.S. ratification of controversial United Nations treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The NEA passes a resolution every year calling for the teaching of global education in the schools.

The NEA convention delegates approved their usual dozen or more resolutions promoting gay rights and feminist curricula, activities, and employment policies. The NEA's board of directors adopted a new plan to encourage school districts to develop materials for classroom discussions on homosexuality. Resolution I-39 calls on NEA members "to engage in courageous conversations in order to examine assumptions, prejudices, discriminatory practices, and their effects" as a "precursor to change."

The NEA authorized a lobbying effort to include support for a new federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation/gender identification." The NEA awarded official observer status to gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered persons at NEA board and executive committee meetings. On the other hand, the NEA refused to rent an exhibit booth at its convention to PFOX (Parents and Friends Of Ex-Gays), a nonprofit Christian group that assists persons trying to leave the gay lifestyle. So much for diversity!

The NEA's principal goal, of course, is to expand jobs that produce dues for the teachers union. New Business Item 57 reveals that one of the purposes of the push for early childhood education is to "organize and represent early childhood employees" who can fill the gaps in the union's declining membership.

Jobs are also behind New Business Item 67 ordering a new NEA push for bilingual education and the development of "strategies for dealing with the English-only movement." The NEA wants to perpetuate the bilingual bureaucracy even though experience proves that the way to teach English to immigrant children is to scrap bilingual education. The NEA is continuing its opposition to the anti-bilingual initiatives passed by the voters in California and Arizona and is trying to defeat similar measures on the ballot in November in Colorado and Massachusetts.

NEA members who don't toe the officially mandated line of NEA bosses never get recognized by the chair. There was no resolution, for example, to criticize the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeal's decision declaring the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional in public schools. But some delegates had their moment of spontaneous rebellion. When the Convention opened with the customary recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, a large number of delegates shouted "under God!" in their loudest voice and were warmly applauded.

### ***New Court Decisions on Schools***

The atheists overplayed their hand. After their string of victories banning prayer and the Ten Commandments, they must have thought the time was ripe to get rid of God in the Pledge of Allegiance. But our country simply isn't going to stand for the ridiculous Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling. A *Newsweek* poll found that a phenomenal 87% of Americans support "under God" in the Pledge.

Congress should not wait for the Supreme Court to reverse the Pledge decision. Congress should immediately use its Article III constitutional power to withdraw jurisdiction from the federal courts by passing a law that reads: "Judicial power may not interfere with the peaceful invocation of God." Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO) has already introduced a bill that would accomplish this.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Cleveland school choice case *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* is being heralded as a turning point in judicial policy toward religiously affiliated schools, but the Pledge of Allegiance decision may turn out to be even more influential. It may galvanize Americans to call a halt to the damage that activist judges have been inflicting for decades.

The Pledge decision came hard on the heels of a media orgy about the 30th anniversary of Watergate. The damage Richard Nixon did to the Constitution in Watergate, however, was minuscule compared to the damage he did in appointing Justice Harry Blackmun of *Roe v. Wade* (abortion) fame and Alfred T. Goodwin, the Ninth Circuit judge who achieved his Andy Warhol 15 minutes of fame with a decision that brought down the wrath of everyone from Jerry Falwell to Tom Daschle.

The judge apparently didn't remember how the Pledge of Allegiance issue helped to defeat Michael Dukakis in 1988. A typical liberal who shrank from flag-waving symbolism, Dukakis had vetoed a law to require public school teachers to lead the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, and his nose was rubbed in his own stupidity by George Bush the First.

The Supreme Court upheld the Cleveland school option plan as "a program of true private choice" even though the big majority of voucher-using parents chose (gasp, gasp) religiously affiliated schools. Some are saying that this is the most important school decision since prayer in schools was banned by *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962 or even since segregation was banned by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

The Cleveland plan is limited to poor children whose parents want to opt them out of some of the worst-rated schools in the country. It won't pay tuition for the children of rich liberal Senators who sanctimoniously orate against school choice for poor kids at the same time that they send their own children to expensive private schools.

While the ruling in the school voucher case applies only to Cleveland, it can usher in a new era of competition in education. It's a significant rupture in the monopoly that the teachers unions hold over tax-supported elementary and secondary schools.

Competition is the only reform that will improve schools. Throwing good money after bad will not help; the public schools already spend several times more money per student than the schools to which the voucher-using parents are so eager to transfer their children. Lengthening the school year or reducing class size will not help. Forcing children into schools at age 3 or 4 will not help.

Teaching self-esteem to children who can't read, write or calculate won't help.

In watching the tantrums indulged in by the teachers unions and their allies, such as the National PTA, their principal argument is not First Amendment but financial. They are squealing because school choice plans divert a tiny fraction of public funds to private schools "that are not accountable to the public." But private schools are accountable to the parents who pay the tuition and can withdraw their children if the schooling isn't satisfactory. Public schools are accountable only to the political bureaucracy that the unions control.

In an argument that doesn't pass the laugh test, the teachers unions assert that private schools and their students should pass government tests to assure that their curriculum is of high quality. "High quality" like the Cleveland public schools where only 10% of students can meet the most basic levels of achievement?

In a letter to the *Economist* magazine, American Federation of Teachers president Sandra Feldman boasted that "the official state-mandated study of the Cleveland voucher program ... found that the gains of public-school students were greater than those of voucher students." That's an argument **for** not against a school-choice plan because it shows that competition works.

School choice plans actually save public funds because private schools consistently educate students for much less money than the public schools are spending. School choice plans may, however, cause the flow of union dues to fall, and that may be the unions' real objection. Hoover Institution scholar Thomas Sowell put his finger on the real problem: "What we are really talking about are the teachers unions wanting to keep a captive audience, for the sake of their members' jobs, and social engineers wanting to control low-income children and their parents."

### ***Public School 'Reform' Won't Help***

A teacher re-certification system, under which public school teachers take special "development" courses to boost their knowledge and teaching skills, was started in Illinois in 2000. It is part of a plan that began six years earlier amid the national push to reform education.

Investigative reporting by the *Chicago Tribune* discovered that teachers are claiming "professional development credits" for gambling at the racetrack, enrolling in Tai Chi classes, and learning to give massages. I'm not making this up; stay tuned.

On a hot July Saturday, 45 Chicago-area teachers assembled at the Arlington Park race track where they had lunch, placed bets, and cheered for their favorite horses. The afternoon of gambling was part of a two-day, 15-credit hour class called "Probabilities in Gaming." The teachers learned how to read the racing guide and calculate the payout. Before placing their bets, they discussed betting odds and how to pick a winner, such as considering the age

of the horse and the days since his last race.

The final assignment was to create a math problem for their students and discuss it. When the teachers departed, however, the classroom math problem had not come up. Nevertheless, David Spangler, the professor who taught this course, claimed that a day at the race track gets teachers excited about math. "The goal is to take math out of the classroom. This is math in the real world."

The high school and middle school educators enrolled in the class said it was a beneficial professional development tool. One teacher commented, "I think it's a boost to a classroom when you have active stuff kids can do." Another teacher, however, had misgivings. He admitted that, "when I told my wife I was going to Arlington racetrack, she didn't believe I was going to a professional development class."

Other courses to earn "development" credits were held in 2001 at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. A masseur calling himself "Magic Fingers" taught 25 teachers the finer points of back rubs, including how to knead kinks out of necks and lower stress levels. In another course on the university campus, Tai Chi expert Al Lawrence led 30 teachers through a Tai Chi workout.

The rules for teacher re-certification specify that teachers must accumulate a prescribed number of credit hours. Other activities that can fulfill the requirement include attending workshops, serving on statewide committees, writing magazine articles, and participating in union activities. Local committees decide whether the credits claimed by the teachers should count, but the teacher unions dominate those committees and the appeals committees.

Nationwide, comprehensive school reform is taking a variety of other forms. It is estimated that more than 8,000 schools will spend \$1 billion this school year on school reform models. Reform can mean anything from tossing out almost everything a school does to implementing a "model" recommended by an outside consultant. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* listed ten expensive models that are used in St. Louis schools, including one that brings the school up to \$1,000 per student in extra federal dollars.

The federal government is spending \$260 million a year on the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, which gives schools three-year grants if they sign up to use a reform program. The law says that grants will be awarded only for programs that have been proven effective, but the law also says it's OK to fund any of the 17 programs designated on the government's approved list, even though they are largely untested and researchers question their value. The American Institute for Research found that only three of the 17 programs could produce some evidence that they work. University of Arizona professor Stan Pogrow, a national critic of comprehensive reform, says legislators and educators are swayed more by aggressive lobbying than by sound research.

U.S. schools don't need billions of dollars of federal

money or high-priced consultants to design comprehensive reform with lots of bells and whistles. They just need to teach first-grade children how to read by the proven phonics method.

At the start of World War II, the U.S. illiteracy rate was 4% for whites and 20% for blacks. At the end of the 20th century, the National Adult Literacy Survey and the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 17% of whites and 40% of blacks can't read.

The hope for all these illiterates is not in more federal spending or phony "reform." Their only hope is for someone to teach them how to read. Since most public schools aren't doing that, parents should do it themselves, which they can easily do with Phyllis Schlafly's *Turbo Reader*.

### ***Why Homeschooling Takes Less Time***

It takes uncommon commitment by parents to undertake a homeschool regimen, but they soon discover they can do in a couple of hours what takes all day at regular school. Homeschooling parents can save lots of time since there are so many courses they don't have to teach.

They don't have to teach multiculturalism, the peculiar notion that other cultures should be preferred to our own, or teach a course in Islam, such as is now taught in California schools. Homeschooling parents are free to teach that their own religion and country are the best.

Homeschooling parents do not have to teach political correctness, such as the dogma that all academic subjects must be taught through the prism of gender and race oppression. They are free to teach that America is not a land of victims but a country of freedom and opportunity for all.

Homeschooling parents do not have to teach the androgyny demanded by radical feminism. They are free to teach boys and girls separately and differently, and let their boys enjoy plenty of recess to work off their excess energy and thereby avoid being given Ritalin to make them behave like girls.

Homeschoolers do not have to take a course every year in Diversity, the code word for gay rights, as is now mandated K-12 by the California State Legislature. Parent educators are free to teach that it is OK to be judgmental about illegal and immoral acts.

Homeschooling parents don't have to teach revisionist history that deletes mention of Washington, Jefferson and Franklin, as the New Jersey State Department of Education tried to do (but had to back down after a parental uproar). Homeschoolers have academic freedom to study the Founding Fathers and read the writings of the DWEMs (Dead White European Males) who contributed so much to Western Civilization.

Homeschoolers do not have to study global education that is designed to promote global interdependence and citizens of the world instead of the U.S.A. Homeschooling parents do not have to teach Environmental Education

fantasies such as that humans exist to serve the earth instead of vice versa.

Homeschoolers don't have to study fuzzy math, whole math, new math, new new math, or rainforest math. They won't waste math time discussing, coloring, playing games, or telling their parents how good they feel about incorrect answers.

Homeschooled children will learn to read using authentic phonics as their first order of business, so they won't have to take remedial reading after three years of failure. They won't be inflicted with Whole Language, which fraudulently teaches children to guess at words from the pictures, skip over difficult words, and substitute any words that seem to fit the context.

Homeschoolers will save lots of time because they don't have to read typical middle school assignments of depressing modern fiction by "nobody" authors writing about drugs, violence, sex, runaway teens, witchcraft, and other depressing subjects. Homeschoolers can read books about heroes and stories that build character, courage, patriotism, and virtue.

Homeschoolers won't have to spend time filling out nosy questionnaires about sex, drugs and suicide. The public schools are obsessed with asking students impudent personal questions such as how many times have you felt depressed and tried to commit suicide.

There are many more worthless courses taught in public schools on which homeschoolers will not spend their precious time, such as courses in murder (forensics is the latest fad), suicide, death and dying, evolution, and self-esteem. Homeschooled students won't have a problem with self-esteem because their self-esteem will be earned by achievement in mastering the important truths of history, literature, math and science.

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**Phyllis Schlafly** has her B.A. from Washington University, her M.A. from Harvard University, her J.D. from Washington University Law School, and an honorary LL.D. from Niagara University. Mrs. Schlafly taught her six children to read before they entered school. Her most recent book, *Turbo Reader*, is a system to teach children how to read. Her best-selling book, *Child Abuse in the Classroom*, was called "required reading for every parent" by Hoover Institution scholar Thomas Sowell. Her nationally syndicated daily radio commentaries and Saturday call-in radio programs are devoted primarily to education topics. Her best-selling video documentary, *Crisis in the Classroom*, is an explanation of why the public schools are the way they are.

#### **The Phyllis Schlafly Report** PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002 ISSN0556-0152

Published monthly by the Eagle Trust Fund, PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Alton, Illinois. Postmaster: Address Corrections should be sent to the Phyllis Schlafly Report, PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002. Phone: (618) 462-5415.

Subscription Price: \$20 per year. Extra copies available: 50¢ each; 3 copies \$1; 30 copies \$5; 100 copies \$10.

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