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Time to Leave 'No Child' Behind

After seven years of rule by decree by President Obama's Chicago crony Arne Duncan, why are Republicans reauthorizing the federal government's authority over the nation's public schools? And why did the new Speaker, Paul Ryan, rush a 1,059-page bill to a floor vote only two days after the text was released on November 30?

Fourteen years ago, while the nation was distracted by the 9/11 attacks and the start of the war in Afghanistan, President George W. Bush was determined to enact "No Child Left Behind" to fulfill his father's pledge to be the "education president." In order to get that bill through a Democrat-controlled Senate, Bush let Senator Ted Kennedy write its most important provisions.

"No Child" expired near the end of Bush's second term, and Obama has governed the nation's public schools for seven years without Congressional authority. Now Congress is serving up a new education law that will control public education long after Obama leaves office.

Two provisions in the House version attracted enough conservatives to pass with the minimum of 218 votes in July, but both were stripped from the final bill. One provision would have recognized a parent's right to opt out of state testing; the other, called "Title I portability," would have allowed students in failing schools to transfer per-pupil federal funding to another public school.

The bill gives teachers unions what they wanted most: eliminating the link between teacher pay and student performance. No wonder NEA has launched a campaign to "get ESEA done."

The bill gives liberals and ethnic lobbies what they wanted most: disaggregation of data, which means continuing to collect and report test scores separately for each minority group, with the stated purpose "to close educational achievement gaps" between groups. The inevitable result is that when schools fail to "close the gap," the apparent solution will be to spend more money on the same failed programs.

All conservatives got in exchange was language that prohibits the federal government from doing what it never

had the authority to do anyway, such as requiring states to adopt the Common Core. That's no compromise, because Common Core is still the easiest way for most states to comply with federal requirements.

The demographics of public school students are changing too fast for any federal role in education, as three statistical trends illustrate. First, the percentage of school-age children who do not speak English at home reached an all-time high of 22% in 2014 and continues to rise with the vast wave of refugees from Muslim countries (not just Syria) and Central America.

Second, the percentage of public school students who qualify for school lunches reached an incredible 51% in the 2012-13 school year, up from 33% in 1994-95. How can students learn about American history, economy and culture if schools operate on the assumption that parents are not even responsible to feed their own children?

Third, the percentage of children under 18 who were living with their own mother and father who are married to each other has fallen to just 64%, while the percentage living with "mother only" rose to 24%. The overwhelming weight of social scientific evidence demonstrates that children of unmarried parents suffer a lifetime of disadvantage which no amount of public investment can overcome.

A prime purpose of public education is to teach children "who we are" as Americans, but the definition of "who we are" has been hijacked by liberals. Obama has used "who we are" to promote everything from Syrian refugees to the Dream Act to closing Guantanamo, and even Speaker Ryan recently said we must increase the number of Muslims allowed into our country because of "who we are."

In Tennessee, where tens of thousands of Muslim refugees have resettled, state standards for social studies require middle school children to spend three weeks studying the tenets of the Muslim faith. Schools cannot teach anything positive about Christianity, but seventh-grade students were required to write that "Allah is the only God" and "Muhammad is the messenger of God."

In Georgia, students were given a fill-in-the-blank

exercise: "Allah is the (BLANK) worshiped by Jews & Christians." Students were penalized unless they completed the sentence with "same God" as the correct answer.

The AP U.S. History (APUSH) Standards are guidelines for how public schools are teaching school kids "who we are." APUSH presents American history as the migration of various people coming into conflict with each other, and treats the English settlers who founded our country as just one group of migrants (white Europeans) who are guilty of oppression against Africans, Indians, and Mexicans.

As Frederick M. Hess pointed out in a recent article, liberals view schooling primarily as a way to combat poverty and racism, undermine traditional family values, and trash American heritage and heroes. If you oppose that liberal agenda, tell your Member of Congress to vote No on any bill to reauthorize federal control of public education.

Arne Has Left the Building

On the last day of 2015 the longest serving member of President Obama's Cabinet, Arne Duncan, quietly stepped down from his official position as what the *Washington Post* called "the most powerful education secretary in U.S. history." The federal government now provides about 10 percent of the money spent on public schools, and Duncan used that money, to an extent never before, to impose his will on local schools.

Arne's departure is a good time to review what's wrong with America's public schools and how the federal government has made them worse. Instead of giving an account of his stewardship, however, Arne Duncan chose to devote his final speech to complaining about Congress's failure to pass new gun-control laws.

Duncan's gun-control speech was given in Chicago which, despite the nation's most restrictive gun laws, nevertheless closed out the year 2015 with more homicides (at least 468) and shootings (over 2,900) than any other American city including New York and Los Angeles. With his call to deprive law-abiding citizens of the means of protecting themselves in their own homes, it's no wonder that Arne Duncan was rated the most "anti-gun" member of Obama's Cabinet by the National Rifle Association.

Duncan likes to brag that the high-school graduation rate edged upward to 82 percent during his tenure, but what he doesn't say is that student achievement has simultaneously declined according to "the nation's report card," the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The NAEP test confirms that most of today's high-school graduates simply haven't learned what Americans expect high-school students to know, nor have they acquired the basic skills they need to support themselves and their future families.

The value of a high-school diploma, as measured by the earning power of high-school graduates, continues

to decline, and the free-trade economy is creating fewer jobs that require no more than a high-school education. Students who graduate from high school today are much worse off economically than high-school graduates of one, two, or three generations ago.

The mantra of "college and career ready" is often used as the measure of what a high-school diploma is supposed to represent. Let's take math, and especially algebra, mastery of which is necessary for any kind of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) career.

New York State uses the statewide Regents exam for high-school algebra in which a raw score of 30 out of 86 was "scaled" to a passing score of 65 (even though, if you do the math, 30 divided by 86 means that only 35 percent of the questions were answered correctly, not 65 percent). But only 63 percent of high-school seniors managed to achieve that so-called passing score, even after several tries; less than a quarter of the students attained the higher "college ready" score.

Even the term "college ready" is misleading, because it only means ready for a two-year community college with open admissions, not a competitive four-year college. At most community colleges, half the students must take "remediation" courses before they can even begin to do college-level work, and most students who enter remediation never earn a college degree.

The decline of public education explains the rebellion against the Common Core, which was foisted on the nation without public approval. It explains why in the Republican presidential contest, all the governors (Bush, Walker, Kasich, Christie, and Huckabee) remain in single digits while the leading candidates say that Common Core is a disaster and pledge to do away with it.

Common Core produced voluminous standards for reading and math, replacing fiction and literature with instructional texts, and replacing computational shortcuts with useless busy-work. Its minimum standards were set low enough for nearly every student to pass, like Lake Wobegon where "all children are above average."

Speaking on December 22 at the high-school gym in Keota, Iowa, Hillary Clinton vowed, "I wouldn't keep any school open that wasn't doing a better than average job." Math wasn't my strongest subject, so I asked my granddaughter, who graduated from college with a math degree and now works as an actuary, to explain how Hillary's proposal would work.

If Hillary really means to close any school "that wasn't doing a better than average job," that would mean closing half the nation's 90,000 public schools next year, half the remaining schools the following year, and so on until just one school was left open. And then that one school would have to close too, because if there's only one school, it can't be "better than average."

News Takes on Education . . .

Coach Put On Leave For Prayer — The Bremer-ton School District in Washington state has put assistant football coach Joe Kennedy on administrative leave for praying after high-school football games. Since 2008, Coach Kennedy has briefly prayed at the 50-yard line after shaking hands with the opposing coach. Players, fans, and other coaches have sometimes joined him, but he has never compelled anyone to join him. This post-game prayer was never questioned until the president of the senior class invited members of the local Satanic Temple to protest it. Rather than stand up to the Satanists, the school's administration gave Coach Kennedy an ultimatum requiring him to move his prayers to a place where no one could see him. The administration also ordered him not to kneel, bow his head, or do anything that could be seen as remotely religious.

At the very next game, along with a large crowd of supporters, Coach Kennedy prayed this prayer: "Lord, I thank you for these kids and the blessing you've given me with them. We believe in the game, we believe in competition and we can come into it as rivals and leave as brothers." Because of this harmless display of goodwill and reverence, Coach Kennedy was put on indefinite administrative leave.

This is just the latest incident in the war on religious freedom that is being waged against American Christians. Liberals want to force Christians such as Coach Kennedy to stop any display of their faith in public. But Kennedy is not backing down. He released a statement saying that "I'm willing to take this as far as it goes to defend our rights under the U.S. Constitution, to the end. If you believe in something, you stand up."

It's time for more Americans to take a stand for our basic constitutional right to the free exercise of our faith.

Student Punished For American Flag Shirt

— A Texas high school student received an in-school suspension for a very interesting dress code violation. His crime was wearing a shirt that had a picture of the American flag on it. Jaegur is a junior at Seagoville High School who is very passionate about the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, or ROTC program, and hopes that he can use that to get a scholarship and go into the military after college.

However, he was stopped by a school administrator and told to lift up the hoodie that he was wearing, revealing the American flag shirt underneath. He was immediately sent to in-school suspension for the remainder of the day.

The problem is, Jaegur did not actually violate the school dress code. Seagoville High School does not have uniforms but does require that students wear solid color

shirts. However, exceptions are made in the case of shirts with school or college logos and shirts supporting the military. In an almost laughable statement, Jaegur's mother was told that the American flag does not constitute legitimate support for the military.

There is a liberal idea seeping into schools nationwide that expressions of support for anything American is wrong. Liberal educators and administrators teach their students that America is no better than any other country, or that it may be even worse than other countries. They scoff at the idea of American exceptionalism and restrict any expression of support for our great nation or the ideals that our nation was built on. Sadly, this means students are not taught about the unique and providential history that made America a beacon of democracy to the world. Students who choose to support our troops with clothing that features an American flag should be praised, not punished.

U.S. History Course Short-Changes Students

— Half a million students take the Advanced Placement test for United States History every year, but these students may be short-changed under the new version of the program. The Advanced Placement system has become a fixture in American education since its introduction after World War II, and many colleges and universities award credits based on students' AP score. For many American students, the AP test takes the place of the required U.S. History course in their college or university. Because this may be the last American history course that many students take, it is very important that the information taught to the students be accurate.

Unfortunately, the new framework put forth by the College Board is a lengthy document that promotes federal control, de-emphasizes content, and gives a false interpretation of American history. It is organized around abstract ideas such as "identity," "peopling," and "human geography," while downplaying essential subjects including the development of America's ideals and political institutions, especially the Constitution. Important events such as elections, wars, diplomacy, inventions, and discoveries are minimized in favor of so-called identity conflicts. The liberals on the College Board apparently do not want students to hear about America as a dynamic and exceptional nation whose citizens have striven through the years for noble ideals.

The study of history should teach students about American exceptionalism, American identity, and America's role in the world. These topics are the foundation of a strong and accurate view of American history. The College Board's new framework for AP U.S. History sadly neglects this essential purpose of education. We have a

duty to our children to ensure that they are not taught a watered-down version of our great national heritage.

Opt-Out Of Common Core Gaining Popularity

— More parents than ever are opting their children out of Common Core tests. At Nathan Hale High School in Seattle, not a single junior took the Common Core standardized tests last spring. At four other Seattle high schools, district officials said 95 percent of juniors refused to take the tests. Seattle-area juniors boycotted tests because they are not needed in order to graduate from high school. Even the teachers at Nathan Hale High School planned to boycott the exams, but state and district officials quickly put a stop to that.

Washington is not the only state where Common Core is being challenged. The *New York Times* reported that about 150,000 out of over one million New York students opted out of testing in the spring of 2015, which is more than double the year before. In Idaho, the Madison School District's board of trustees voted unanimously against giving students Common Core tests. But the superintendent and board reversed that decision after state officials claimed that the refusal to use Common Core tests could cost the state millions of dollars in funding.

Despite the controversy, 40 percent of Madison district parents opted their kids out of Common Core tests. The schools are planning to continue allowing alternative methods of assessment that do not burden the teachers or students with unnecessary tests. Students who opt out of standardized testing will still be allowed to pass on to the next grade level and to graduate. Other school districts and states should follow the example of these districts in Washington, New York, and Idaho. Opposition to Common Core has already benefitted students around the country, but many school districts still need to hear from concerned parents who are willing to stand up for the right of their child to an education that does not use Common Core tests.

The NEA's Pro-Gay Agenda — If you want to stay on top of what is going on in schools, you should carefully watch the policies adopted by the National Education Association. The NEA's 3 million members include most of the nation's public school teachers, and they fund its half-billion dollar budget with their mandatory union dues. At the NEA's annual convention, resolutions typically recycle every liberal buzzword you can think of, such as diversity, inclusion, sexual orientation, pluralism, stereotypes, reproductive freedom, racism, sexism, homophobia, equity, multiculturalism, undocumented immigrants, and global interdependency. At this year's convention in Orlando, several propaganda terms appeared for the first time, including marriage equality, gender identity, and institutional racism.

Until this year, the NEA had refrained from explicitly endorsing same-sex marriage, although it was on record in favor of equal benefits for domestic partners, for repealing the federal Defense of Marriage Act, and other tenets of the gay-rights agenda.

This year's NEA convention targeted this issue more directly by declaring that teachers should tolerate no opposition to so-called marriage equality, even for sincere religious reasons. The teachers union adopted this New Business Item: "The NEA will develop educational materials for its state affiliates and members about the potential dangers of so-called 'Religious Freedom Restoration Acts,' which may license individuals and corporations to discriminate on the theory that their religious beliefs require such actions." It is now more important than ever for parents to find out and become aware of what is being taught to their children in public school.

The NEA is a Left-Wing Social Justice Organization

— The Orlando, Florida NEA Assembly removed any doubt this year that the National Education Association is really a leftwing social justice organization. Educating students takes a back seat to the union goals of changing societal values and government regulations to reflect what the NEA thinks they should be. Some of their many goals include promoting the radical gay rights agenda, climate change activism, UN globalism, sex education and abortion rights, unlimited immigration, and a host of other liberal, progressive agenda items.

In her opening speech as NEA union President, Lily Eskelsen Garcia said, "We truly, truly are the NEA. We are the rabble-rousers. We are the activists." She spoke about her first-time experience as a delegate to the convention, saying "I had this sense: we're going to do something important. The people in this room are going to come together and something will be better for someone else's child." That's a grand sentiment, but unfortunately most of what the NEA does and believes in doesn't translate into making anything "better" for our children.

Promoting social justice themes was a major subject at the NEA Convention last July. One resolution says "the NEA will use its communication tools to highlight examples of NEA members who incorporate social justice into their teaching practice or community engagement."

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