The Tide Is Turning Against Federal Education Bills

April 25, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

We've heard a lot about Republican plans to return power to the states. Bob Dole, in his stump speech, ostentatiously pulls a copy of the Tenth Amendment from his pocket, reminding us about the powers that are "reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Nothing in the Tenth Amendment, however, authorizes the devolution of power to the Governors of the various states. Yet, under the bipartisan education bills now moving through Congress, the Federal Government would collect taxes, issue new federal regulations about the public schools (an area that should be "reserved to the states"), and then give the money and the power to the Governors, bypassing state legislatures altogether.

This massive legislation, which seeks to restructure public schools throughout all 50 states, builds on the Goals 2000 Act and the School-to-Work Act, both passed in 1994 and signed by President Clinton. H.R.1617 (known as the CAREERS bill) passed the House last September by a vote of 345 to 79, and its companion S.143 (the Workforce Development Act) passed the Senate in October by 95 to 2.

One might think that such large majorities would mean that the bills are not controversial. Actually they've stirred up a hornet's nest.

Speaker Gingrich has just received a letter signed by 63 Republican members of the Missouri House objecting to the fact that H.R.1617 "centralizes unprecedented powers at the federal level" and "supersedes state laws and further takes us, the local elected officials of the people of this state, out of the process of education." These legislators specifically object to the way that the CAREERS act "amends out the state legislature, replacing it with the Governor."

Since Missouri has a liberal Democratic Governor, Mel Carnahan, it's easy to see why Republican legislators think this is a very bad idea. A similar letter was signed by 13 Republican Missouri State Senators.

The letter from the 63 Missouri State Representatives asserts that "this practice of avoiding the Legislature is unacceptable and flies in the face of the principle of local control of education."

The Missouri letter also describes the devious additional ways that real power over school curriculum is being gathered into the hands of unelected bureaucrats, bypassing all elected officials such as state legislators and school boards. This is accomplished through the grant application which each Governor must submit in order to access federal money under the 1994 laws, as well as under the new legislation.

These grant applications bind the states to conform to "standards" and "assessments" that are written by unelected federal or state bureaucrats and over which no elected representative or parent had any authority. In addition, the grant applications bind the states to spend money that the legislature had not appropriated.

Republican Congressmen who voted for H.R.1617 have made a strenuous effort to allay the fears of their constituents by asserting that these are "Republican" bills. That's not true.

The fact is that the Senate bill was largely written by a Senator Ted Kennedy staffer, the late Steve Spinner, who worked on it for three years. On the floor of the U.S. Senate, both Kennedy and Senator Nancy Kassebaum paid tribute to Spinner as the principal author of the bill and of the whole concept of using the public schools to carry out "work force education and employment functions" and turn schools into "a comprehensive one-stop delivery system."

The micromanaging of public school curricula that will be exercised by the federal bureaucrats is evident from a letter in which the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education rejected the State of California's grant application for funds from the School to Work Law. The letter charged that California showed "a lack of systemic methods within the State to integrate vocational and academic curricula" and that California had failed to develop "Certificates for Foundations Skills and Career Entry."

A letter signed by 14 California State Senators called on Congress to "kill" H.R.1617. Among the many reasons cited were the awesome provision that would strike "a State" from certain federal laws and substitute "the Governor of the State," the extraordinary powers given to all Governors, and the setting up of a "National Electronic Data Base."

Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL), who voted for the CAREERS bill last year, has changed his mind and recently circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter urging the repeal of Goals 2000 and the School to Work Act, as well as the defeat of H.R.1617 and S.143. He pointed out that they are all designed to implement the plan laid out in an 18-page letter written by Marc Tucker to Hillary Clinton on November 11, 1992, to make schoolchildren "guinea pigs who will become the human resources for the global labor market."

It is clear from the writings of Marc Tucker, Ira Magaziner, Hillary Clinton, Robert Reich, and the legislative history of H.R.1617 and S.143 that the goal is to transform public school curricula into specific workforce tracks determined by local workforce development boards. The proper name for this is National Economic Planning, a.k.a. Socialism, a system that has failed all over the world.