Time to Leave "No Child" Behind

By Phyllis Schlafly *December 1, 2015*

After seven years of rule by decree by President Obama's Chicago crony Arne Duncan, why are Republicans about to reauthorize the federal government's authority over the nation's public schools? And why is the new Speaker, Paul Ryan, rushing 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 about to serve 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, 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 the bill to reauthorize federal control of public education.