What's At Stake In Education Committee Chairmanship?

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As members of Congress are jockeying for chairmanships in the 107th Congress, the committees that handle big money seem to get all the headlines, but the Education chairmanship may ultimately have the most influence on policy. Public opinion surveys indicate that education is America's biggest issue, and the new chairman will decide quo vadis -- at our current crossroads, which way will Congress go? School choice may be the most visible education controversy, but it's not the one that the chairman will be able to resolve because that is primarily a state and local issue. The chairman will have a big impact, however, on whether we continue to implement Bill Clinton's two controversial 1994 laws, Goals 2000 and School-to-Work, or instead call a halt to the mission and curriculum changes those laws initiated.

"School-to-Work" (STW) is bureaucratic jargon for imposing a new paradigm on public schools that de-emphasizes traditional academic studies and replaces them with vocational-technical (Vo-Tech) courses for all students. There's nothing wrong with vocational education; that's always been an option for high school students.

But School-to-Work is not an option; it's a federal law, quintessentially Clintonian. States that accept STW funds, and all states have accepted them, are subject to STW regulations.

School-to-Work is the mainspring of the Clinton Administration's audacious plan to impose German/Japanese style national economic planning to parallel the 1994 Clinton health care plan to take over the entire health industry, one-seventh of our economy. Indeed, the same schemers were the principal architects of both plans: Hillary Clinton and Ira Magaziner.

The writings of Clinton's economic adviser, Robert Reich, show that he is a frank admirer of the German model, which exercises government control over the economy by controlling access to the workforce through the schools. School-to-Work was easily sold to big corporations which envy the privileged corporate-government relationship their peers enjoy in Germany and Japan.

The STW paradigm is marketed to public schools all over the country by Marc Tucker's National Center for Education and the Economy, whose letterhead boasts the names of Hillary Clinton, Ira Magaziner and David Rockefeller Jr. The STW paradigm is packaged for Governors by offering them federal funds, a route to bypass state legislatures and school boards, and attractive "partnerships" with corporations.

One marketing outreach aimed at Governors is a 501(c)(3) organization called CDS International (initials not explained on its letterhead). CDS brags that it has organized STW programs for representatives of public schools, government, industry and labor in more than 20 states.

CDS's brochure explains that STW's goal is to move American children into "The German Dual System of Vocational Training" under which Germany transfers nearly 70 percent of its students at age 16 from full-time secondary school to spending most of their time as apprentices in the workplace. National training standards have been established for each occupation in Germany, and company training is governed by federal law.

The German system requires the student to spend 3-4 days a week in the workforce under an employer's mentorship, and only 1-2 days a week in traditional education learning mathematics, science, social

studies and languages. CDS states, "The dual system regulations and examinations are products of close cooperation among schools, government, employers (operating through their associations), and workers (represented by their unions)."

The STW paradigm involves establishing the mindset that the mission of the schools is to serve the workforce and the global economy, rather than to give all American children the basic knowledge and skills that can enable them to be all they can be. This is why the 1994 STW law dictates that the Secretaries of Education and Labor "shall jointly provide for, and shall exercise final authority over the administration of this Act," and why the House committee that wrote this law is called the Education and the Workforce Committee.

Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), one Congressman now running for chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, has made it clear which side of the STW controversy he is on. In a December 7 letter circulating on Capitol Hill, he comes out strongly against proposals to separate education and the workforce into two committees.

Boehner's letter states in bold italics that "it is simply impossible to consider workforce and education issues separately. . . . The two are becoming even more indistinguishable as lifelong learning becomes absolutely necessary in the New Economy."

The new school-corporate partnership is tantalizing to Big Government Republicans who spend taxpayers' money and solicit corporate political donations. Boehner's letter reminds us that "a structure that allows education and workforce issues together also allows us to add employers to our coalition efforts."

To have any chance of seizing the initiative on the education issue, the Republican Congress will have to elect a House Education committee chairman who understands and opposes Clinton-style School-to-Work.