from Phyllis Schlafly

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America 2000 is Heading Us Into a National School System

Education has emerged as a national issue in a very short historical tine-frame. that speed in itself is newsworthy; the U.S. Department of Education only dates from the Jimmy Carter administration in the 1970s, and Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 on the promise to abolish it.

Yet now, in 1992, George Bush is campaigning to be the “Education President.” Big money and policy changes are implicit in that promise.

The centerpiece of the Bush Administration’s education drive is a concept cal-led “America 2000.” Whatever this means, we can be sure it includes spending more federal taxpayer dollars.

America 2000 is the catchword to “restructure” our 110,000 elementary and secondary schools into a national system by means of national goals, national standards, national tests, national teacher certification, national report cards now model national schools, nearly a billion dollars of additional national funding to conform the schools to the national agenda, national scholarships, and national awards and rewards for those who cooperate. Lip service is paid to local control, but the more we study the America 2000 prospectus, the more we conclude that loca1ly elected school boards will become irrelevant because the federal money flow will drive the process.

America 2000 also pays lip service to the principle of parental choice in schools, but that is an illusive concept in the official prospectus. Anyway, the U.S. Senate on a party line vote removed the school choice section from the education bill, leaving it essentially a Kennedy-Metzenbaum big spending hill.

There is considerable evidence that America 2000 advocates really don't want parents to have a private school option at all, but instead want to turn all private school-s into public schools. America 2000 seeks conformity to nationally regulated standards and wants to anoint with tax dollars only those schools that are “held accountable by a public authority.”

National tests will inevitably prescribe a national curriculum. Who will write the tests? Ear1y indications are that national tests will be less about academic achievement than about attitudes, feelings, and values -- an area where social and political biases so, easily replace objectivity.

America 2000 has a concept of “school” that not only includes absorbing private schools into its system, but also includes expanding the public schools in order to “parent” children through their preschool years, in their after-school hours, and for non-school services. America 2000 wants to transform public schools into baby-sitters for pre-kindergarten kids, and into social service centers to provide meals, health care (probably including the controversial kinds), counseling, and guidance.

With the failure of centralized bureaucracies all over the world, it is truly amazing that a Republican Administration is trying to drive the education “bus” headlong into a vastly more centralized and federally controlled system than our nation has ever had.

How else can one read America 2000’s number one goal: “All children in America will start school ready to learn.” This goal is buttressed by a lot of warm, fuzzy rhetoric about “early intervention strategies” and “early childhood development.”

Will government agents go into the homes and dictate how preschool children are raised -- and then snitch on parents who reject, the government's “suggestions”? This sort of thing is already being experimented with under the name “Parents as Teachers,” but which many people call the “Teachers as Parents” program. Americans absolutely don't want that kind of Big Brother society.

What Newsweek calls “The Curse of Self-Esteem” is spreading through the public schools a whole Lot faster than America 2000 or academic reform of any kind. The folly of this fad was best illustrated by the comic strip kid who told his stuffed animal pal, “I quit doing homework. Homework is bad for my self-esteem. ft sends the message that I don’t know enough. Instead of trying to learn, I'm just concentrating on liking myself the way I am.”

To the question as to how his self-esteem could be “enhanced by remaining an ignoramus,” the child replies, “Just call me informationally impaired.” Maybe that’s the name of a new “disability” that will entitle the kid to a job under the Americans With Disabilities Act.

America 2000 is fundamentally flawed because (a) it doesn't address the biggest problem in schools, namely, the failure to teach first-grade children to read, (b) it doesn't address the second biggest problem in education, the substitution of psychological pap for the basics, and (c) it heads the public school system in the direction of tighter monopoly control instead of opening it up to parental choice.

It's time for American parents to rebel and demand some glasnost and perestroika in our taxpayer-financed schools.