# THE REPUBLICANS' MOST URGENT TASK

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Are the new Republican majorities in Congress and in state legislatures really serious about reducing the size and spending power of Big Government? That question will be answered in large part by what actions Republicans take to cut the power of the teacher unions, specifically the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

While those two powerful organizations (estimated annual revenue $1 billion) have some personnel differences, they walk in lockstep in support of high taxes, Big Government, and total control of education policies. The NEA and the AFT support the same Democratic candidates, and they manifest the same hostility to all market-oriented reforms of the public school system, such as parental choice, contract schools, and homeschooling.

They are the single most powerful force in the Democratic Party. At the 1992 Democratic National Convention, one delegate out of eight was an NEA or AFT member. That's more delegates than New York Governor Mario Cuomo could command. The NEA was an early and enthusiastic endorser of Bill Clinton in his campaign for the Presidency.

The NEA contributes heavily in cash and "in-kind" to Democratic candidates. The NEA's idea of "bipartisanship" was shown in the 1992 campaign when it endorsed 38 Democratic Senators and gave one small contribution in the primary only to one Republican Senator.

According to Dr. Myron Lieberman in a new policy paper published by the Claremont Institute, there is plenty the Republicans can do about this. His recommendations are good public policy as well as a major piece of good advice to conservatives. Most of these ideas involve eliminating the enormous taxpayer subsidies that the teacher unions now receive, a scandal largely hidden from the American people.

Since state bargaining laws in some states are the foundation of teacher union membership, revenues and political power, many of these problems must be addressed by state legislatures. But there are many things Congress can do.

For starters, Congress should eliminate the plush tax exemption enjoyed by the NEA's building in Washington, D.C. Currently assessed at $64.8 million, the NEA should pay property taxes of $1.4 million, an amount equivalent to the national dues of 14,000 members.

The NEA enjoys this tax exemption because of a fluke - it was chartered by Congress in 1907 when it was a small, voluntary education association, NOT a union. It is unfair and discriminatory for the NEA to continue to own this valuable preference when no other union gets similar treatment. Other organizations chartered by Congress

are educational or charitable, such as the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts, while the primary activity of the NEA is influencing legislation and public opinion.

Secondly, Congress should make it illegal for the NEA and the AFT to enjoy the enormously valuable advantage of having school districts (i.e., the government) make payroll deductions of union dues and Political Action Committee (PAC) funds from teachers' salaries and transmit such funds to the unions at no cost to the union. *NEAi* AFT revenues would plummet if this preferential treatment were stopped, because volunteer contributions are only a small part of union revenues.

How easy it is for the teacher unions to raise political money can be seen by the way they raised funds to defeat the California School Choice initiative in 1993: the California Teachers Association merely assessed its 200,000 members $19 each for three years. By contrast, those who oppose teacher union policies and candidates must spend one-third to one-half of their money and energies on fundraising.

The typical teacher union contract not only requires this checkoff of salaries for dues and PAC funds, but gives the union a veto over other deductions that might be made. Wouldn't it be nice if a Republican or Conservative PAC could raise its political funds by a checkoff of teachers' salaries?

This is not only a conservative-liberal issue, and not only a public policy issue, but also a constitutional issue. Should the government (i.e., a school district) be permitted to participate in and pay for fund-raising for political candidates supported by one special interest group?

Third, Congress should require the NEA and AFT and their affiliates to meet the reporting and disclosure requirements applicable to private-sector unions under the Landrum-Griffin Act, Section 201. This would require the unions to report their assets, liabilities, receipts, sources of revenue, and salary and benefits paid to officers. Most union members would be shocked to learn how many union officials are paid more than $100,000 a year plus benefits.

Fourth, Congress should abolish the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), a $25 million-a-year boondoggle for the teacher unions to put their favorites on the taxpayers' payroll, who can work to set up a certification system to give preferential certification to teachers who are union members.

Those who support less government, lower taxes, and more reliance on markets and incentives should realize that public-sector unions, such as the NEA and AFT, are the major obstacles to these goals. Every conservative objective would be helped by removing taxpayer subsidies from the NEA and AFT.