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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

President Reagan is trying diligently to fulfill his mandate to cut federal spending toward his long range goal of balancing the budget. Out of the some 150 programs in the Department of Education, his Office of Management and Budget has targeted one for abolition.

That isn't very much of a cut, but the elimination of even that one program has run into all kinds of opposition. The OMB request is being opposed even by Secretary of Education Terrel Bell. The National Institute of Education (NIE) has an FY 1982 budget of $55 million. Its purpose is to fund research on education and to promote equality of educational opportunity.

Since its start in 1972, the NIE has spent millions of dollars on unnecessary and irrelevant programs. Here are some typical examples of NIE programs funded by federal tax dollars: $79,065 on "Parents' Policies and Political Structure" to study why parents send their children to parochial schools; $62,000 on "Moral Development of Life Outcomes" to test the hypothesis that the level of moral judgment of late adolescence predicts life outcomes; $45,000 on "Sex and School Board Activity" to explore educational policies of school boards with varying numbers of female members.

More NIE examples include: $286,017 on "Harvard Project Zero" to improve educational practices in aesthetic perception and production; $1.5 million to provide a scientific basis for the development of new organizational forms for elementary and secondary schools; $3.3 million on a Television Career Awareness Project to design, develop, produce, broadcast, and evaluate a TV series for elementary school children with the goal of expanding career awareness; $102,127 to study "Sex Role Attitudes in Young Women and Men"; $65,975 to study "Why Women Avoid the Study of Mathematics".

The NIE has even opposed Republican policy. In 1981, nine months after Ronald Reagan took office, NIE sponsored a conference on Tuition Tax Credits. Of the 13 papers presented, 12 were against Tuition Tax Credits.

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This was despite the fact that the Republican Platform of 1980 stated: "Next year, a Republican White House will assist, not sabotage, Congressional efforts to enact tuition tax relief into law."

The NIE has not always enjoyed universal acceptance. Only two years after it was established, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to recommend zero funding for it (despite NIE's request for $130 million). The House continued to appropriate funds, however, and NIE has lived a charmed existence ever since.

Created by the Education Amendments of 1972, NIE is the most active federal agency in the sensitive area of curriculum development. NIE also finances teacher training, instruction techniques, equal educational opportunity, and equity financing in education. NIE projects are designed to influence teachers, administrators, and decision-makers at all levels of education. By law, 90 percent of NIE's budget must be expended for research and development.

One of the reasons why so many people opposed the establishment of a Department of Education was the fear that such a department would lead to a final federal takeover of education including curriculum. Those fears are not allayed by knowledge that Secretary Terrel Bell is pushing hard to replace the Department of Education with a "National Education Foundation" which would retain federal control over education.

The American people don't want federal agencies developing new textbooks, curriculums, and methods of instruction for local schools districts. That kind of governmental thought control is simply not the kind of society we want in the United States. We are much better off if private publishing houses offer their wares and local schools boards make their selections of textbooks and curricula.

President Reagan promised to abolish the Department of Education, and his election was certainly a mandate for cutting back federal spending. He can and should fulfill his campaign promise by (1) transferring funds to states through block grants and (2) moving essential education functions to other federal agencies.

NIE, by any standard, is not essential. As one of the most controversial of all federal programs, it is expendable and should be abolished.

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