Look Out For Another Big Spending Boondoggle

by Phyllis Schlafly July 18, 2007

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A new grab for power over education now lurking in the corridors of Congress reminds me of a song popular in the Harry James/Frank Sinatra era: "I've Heard That Song Before." Section 3401, inserted by the Senate (but not the House) in the pending America COMPETES Act (S.761), would give us another costly and harmful expansion of the federal education bureaucracy.

Like many of the "comprehensive" bills in Congress these days, Section 3401 contains jargon that needs to be translated. The words with specialized meanings in this bill are "alignment," "21st century workforce," "P-16," "partnership," and "accountability."

Section 3401 starts off with an authoritarian caption that should alert us to the power grab: "Alignment of secondary school graduation requirements with the demands of 21st century postsecondary endeavors and support for P-16 education data systems." To align means to bring into line with a group, party or cause.

To what cause will we be forced into line with? The bill responds: "the demands of higher education, the 21st century workforce, and the Armed Services."

This mandated alignment will cover student knowledge, skills, academic content standards, assessments, and curricula in elementary and secondary schools. But federal politicians and bureaucrats have no business dictating school curriculum.

It's downright ridiculous to appropriate tax dollars to induce public schools to find out what students need to know in order to enter college or the Armed Services. The secondary schools can make a few phone calls and get any college or military branch to send a free catalog full of application information and entrance requirements.

Then the schools can buckle down and prepare students to pass the entrance exams. Congress could do something really constructive by refusing all grants and loans to students taking remedial courses in college (to learn what the high schools should have taught them).

Including "the 21st century workforce" in the alignment mandate is the bridge to grabbing federal control over high school curriculum for students who won't be going to college. That bit of jargon opens the door to pour more funding into the controversial Clinton school-to-work and workforce development programs.

When the globalists talk about restructuring the U.S. education system to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce, they mean conditioning and training our young people to compete with the low wages paid in the global labor market.

P-16 is a rather new term meaning that Big Brother government is now supervising the next generation from pre-school through the 16th year of education (i.e., college graduation). We used to think K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) was the scope of government schools.

It appears that a major purpose of this audacious legislation is the establishment of a "P-16 education longitudinal data system." The plan is to enter all children into the government's database while they are in pre-school and then track them all the way through college.

States will be induced (bribed) to cooperate in this expansion of federal power by grants from a $100,000,000 pot of federal money in only the first year.

The P-16 data system will have a "unique identifier" for each child that will be retained from pre-school through college. The database will include, among other things, "information about the points at which students exit, transfer in, transfer out, drop out, or complete P-16 programs," "test records," "information on courses completed and grades earned," and how students "transitioned" from high school to college.

Section 3401 spells out a broad range of other powers the states can exercise after winning one of these grants. States can use the funds to make "changes that need to be made to a state's secondary school graduation requirements," "specifying the courses and performance levels necessary for acceptance" into college.

States can use the funds to make changes in coursework in high schools in order for students to be accepted into the 21st century workforce. Students will be taught "21st century learning skills" such as "global awareness."

Section 3401 authorizes the creation of a "statewide partnership" whose powers are unspecified. The "partners" will be at least a dozen politicians and education bureaucrats, plus one lone "representative of the business community," but, of course, no parents.

Section 3401's goals are wrapped in the comforting word "accountability." But the bill never says to whom the schools are to be accountable; clearly, it does not call for accountability to parents or taxpayers.

The America COMPETES Act is now in conference. Tell your House Members not to agree to Section 3401 because it will waste taxpayers' money, expand an unnecessary and overbearing bureaucracy, give the Federal Government control of

all school curricula, and put information about all children in a government database.