NEA Convention Delegates Gather to Gloat

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While most Americans were enjoying nonpolitical fireworks and cookouts over the Fourth of July weekend, 8,923 delegates and 5,469 registered non-delegates to the annual National Education Association (NEA) convention were meeting in Atlanta to gloat about their political victories. This largest teachers' union had so much to gloat about that some of the trendy T-shirts sported the slogan "We're molding the future."

Not only had they elected the presidential candidate whom 91 percent of their delegates had voted to endorse at last year's convention (Bill Clinton, of course), but they were able to boast about remarkable victories in the two landmark Republican Congresses, both the 104th and the 105th.

NEA speakers and convention materials related how the NEA had been under fire from Congressional attacks and Republican Presidential nominee Bob Dole, who had threatened to abolish the Department of Education. The NEA bragged that the Association had counterattacked with a "historic grassroots effort and legislative crisis campaign" that "paid off."

Indeed it did. Congress reversed two years of record cuts to education and, in September 1996, passed the single, largest increase ever in federal education funding: $3.5 billion for FY 1997. This surpassed even Clinton's budget request.

The NEA's political work is as much about ideology as harvesting increased tax dollars for public schools. The NEA took credit for defeating the Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act, all voucher bills, and all attempts to make English the official language of our public schools and to curtail Goals 2000, School-to-Work, and affirmative action.

The NEA's 1996 political campaign can now be revealed to have included television advertisements, editorial coverage, radio actualities, and member telephone contacts. This very wealthy union provided plenty of organizational back up from its Government Relations field teams in Washington, D.C. and Denver, Colorado in order to "enhance their effectiveness in political activities and legislative advocacy."

NEA-financed field teams engage in training, strategic planning, and consultation with state and local affiliates in order to increase participation in federal and state elections, ballot initiatives, and lobbying Congress and state legislatures. During the past year, NEA staff have worked on state legislative and ballot initiative issues, as well as on training and organizing members to elect NEA candidates in school board elections.

The NEA's "Information Resources and Advocacy" program provides a diverse range of information services -- including political polling, message development, policy development, and professional writing -- to promote the legislative and political advocacy objectives of the Association. This Information Resources program also works to advance NEA's legislative agenda and resolutions with elected and appointed public officials.

The NEA's Political Affairs program wages what it calls "effective, unified campaigns to elect leaders, from the school board to the White House, who are committed to public education," i.e., the NEA political agenda. The NEA-PAC ranks among the top 10 of the more than 4,000 political action committees, and claims that, in the 1996 campaign cycle, 60% of the candidates it supported were victorious.

The NEA is predicting that, while Congress has not yet finalized the FY 1998 budget, Education Department programs have the potential to receive a second historic increase in federal spending from the Republican Congress. The NEA is also confident that Congress will pass the Kennedy-Hatch KidCare bill, a first step toward the single-payer socialized medicine system that the NEA has endorsed for years.

At the Atlanta convention, the NEA's Gay Lesbian Caucus was strutting its stuff, celebrating its tenth anniversary with honored guest, Candace Gingrich, sister of Newt. The NEA-GLC caucus has succeeded in weaving its agenda into about a dozen resolutions passed by the convention.

For several years, "diversity" has been the code word for the gay-lesbian agenda. This year's convention accepted a one-word change in the Diversity resolution: Last year's resolution said that "education should increase tolerance," but this year's resolution changed "tolerance" to "acceptance."

The NEA convention resolutions again endorsed "reproductive freedom." Pro-life teachers made a valiant attempt to pass an amendment requiring the secretary-treasurer "to ensure to the NEA membership that no General Fund monies are expended for abortion lobbying activities," but it failed by a vote of 2,408 to 5,748.

Before they left Atlanta, the NEA delegates endorsed their usual tiresome roundup of non-academic, ultra-left political policies including funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, public financing for public broadcasting, statehood for the District of Columbia, the education of children of illegal aliens, ratification of UN treaties on women and children, and a national holiday honoring Cesar Chavez.

Politics is obviously more important to the NEA than education.