NEA Conventioneers Plot Anti-Voucher Action

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The National Education Association (NEA) adopted several new goals at its annual convention held in Dallas over the long Fourth of July weekend. No, they don't have anything to do with improving schoolchildren's reading, writing or calculating skills.
The NEA's first and most important goal is to fight against any voucher plan, such as the Cleveland plan which was recently upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, and which the NEA now forecasts will be imitated in seven or eight other states. Criticizing the Court's ruling in Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, NEA's outgoing president Bob Chase proclaimed in his keynote address: Just because the Court said vouchers are constitutional, "that does not make it right."

What's so bad about vouchers? Two reasons, according to Chase's platform histrionics. First, "it is driven by ideologues . . . not by teachers and other educators," and second, it rests on "the big lie . . . that public education has failed."

Voucher advocates must confess to the accuracy of the first charge: their movement is not driven by teachers but by parents and taxpayers. But they are no more ideologues than NEA officials.

To support his claim that it's a "lie" to assert that public schools have failed, Chase cited a Money magazine report that 10 percent of public schools are as academically outstanding as the most prestigious private schools. For those who had fuzzy math and didn't learn how to subtract, that means 90 percent of public schools are NOT as good as private schools, which is why vouchers look attractive to so many parents.

It's clear that opposition to vouchers is the litmus test for election as an NEA official. Delegates listened to 17 candidates who were given a couple of minutes to make their case, and most of them used their time allotment to denounce vouchers.

Chase's math is just as fuzzy when he talks about funding for public schools. He shouted in indignation that the President and Congress appropriated "trillions for tax cuts, overwhelmingly for the rich," plus billions for the Pentagon, corporate bailouts and farmers, leaving "no new money left for public education."

In fact, Congress authorized a record $26.3 billion for public education in President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, plus "such sums as may be necessary" for 10 specific programs. That's $8 billion more than the last Clinton education bill.

The NEA carries on a vicious personal counterattack against parents who oppose NEA policies or candidates. The Convention passed New Business Item 5, which calls on the NEA "to provide ongoing strategic information to members and affiliates that increase member knowledge of the ongoing attacks designed to destroy NEA and its affiliates, limit educators' freedom of speech and their right to political participation."

This information will include "identification and history of individuals and organizations that support the attacks and sources of funds that support these attack efforts," "status reports on tactics used by attack groups at the local, state, and national levels," and "status reports on responses by NEA and its affiliates to deal with the attacks." All this sounds ominously like a database on parents who object to NEA politicking or leftwing curricula.

In NEA newspeak, "attack groups" means groups of concerned parents, and "attacks designed to destroy NEA" means support for vouchers or tax credits. "Limit educators' freedom of speech" means parental efforts to opt their children out of courses promoting premarital sex, gay rights or anti-Christian multiculturalism, and limiting "their right to political participation" means objecting to teachers proselyting schoolchildren in behalf of the NEA's designated candidates, school tax increases and bond issues.

The NEA convention delegates approved their usual dozen or more resolutions promoting gay rights and feminist curricula, activities, and employment policies. The NEA's board of directors adopted a new plan to encourage school districts to develop materials for classroom discussions on homosexuality.

The NEA's principal goal, of course, is to expand jobs that produce dues to the teachers union. New Business Item 57 reveals that one of the purposes of the push for early childhood education is to "organize and represent early childhood employees" who can fill the gaps in the union's declining membership.

Jobs are also behind New Business Item 67 ordering a new NEA push for bilingual education. Experience since the passage of California's Proposition 227 proves that the way to teach English to immigrant children is to scrap bilingual education, but the NEA wants to perpetuate the bilingual bureaucracy anyway.

NEA members who don't toe the officially mandated line of NEA bosses never get recognized by the chair. There was no resolution, for example, to criticize the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeal's decision declaring the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional in public schools.

But some delegates had their moment of spontaneous rebellion. When the Convention opened with the customary recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, a large number of delegates shouted "under God!" in their loudest voice and were warmly applauded.