Education Reform, Ted Kennedy-Style

by Phyllis Schlafly *July 27, 1995*

Here's a multiple-choice question for you. Will the new conservative Republican majority in Congress (a) terminate federal functions for which there is no constitutional authority, e.g., education; (b) reduce the size of government by abolishing agencies, e.g., the Department of Education; (c) reduce the power of the Federal Government to micro manage our lives, e.g., stop mandating school curriculum; or (d) adopt a Ted Kennedy blueprint to manage individual behavior from the schoolroom to the workplace?

If you picked (d), you are on to the plan of the "moderate" House Republicans to use the current momentum for education reform to put America into the harness of National Economic Planning, a.k.a. socialism. Their plan is to use the school system to prepare children, individually and collectively, only for jobs that are designated and determined by the planners.

One bill, sponsored by two senior Republicans, Steve Gunderson (R-WI) and Bill Goodling (R-PA), is called "A Proposal for the Establishment of the Department of Education and Employment. " Riding the tide of the movement to abolish the Department of Education, their bill would simply consolidate it with the Department of Labor and put Robert Reich in charge.

This bill would convert public schools into "Workforce Preparation" centers "to meet the challenges of a competitive global economy in the 21st century. " Schoolchildren would be trained, rather than educated, and schools would become "efficient delivery systems" to serve the global economy.

A variation of this same goal, called the "Consolidated and Reformed Education, Employment, and Rehabilitation Systems Act" (H.R. 1617), known by its acronym CAREERS, was introduced on May 11 and speedily passed out of committee on June 22. Sponsored by Rep. Howard McKeon (R-CA) , it is actually modeled on a bill introduced earlier this year by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) called the "Workforce Development Act" (S. 180). H.R. 1617 was designed to deceive conservatives by repealing last year's "Schools-to-Work" Act and some other cumbersome and redundant jobs and education programs. However, **H.R.** 1617's 233 pages contain much more dangerous replacements.

Three key provisions in the Republican CAREERS bill parallel the key provisions of Kennedy's "Workforce" bill.

The first key provision is that both bills give government the responsibility for job placement and development through a "Workforce Development Plan." Kennedy's

"Workforce" bill would implement this through federal, state and local boards. McKeon's CAREERS bill specifies that the Governor shall submit "a strategic state workforce development and literacy plan to provide policy guidance with respect to workforce development progress" that meets the requirements of the U.S. Secretaries of Education and Labor.

The second key provision of both "Workforce" and CAREERS is a labor market information system (LMIS). "Workforce" calls for a "comprehensive, integrated labor market [information] system to assure that workforce development programs are related to the demand for particular skills in a local labor market. " CAREERS would amend the 1933 Wagner Act to enumerate the information that will be collected, managed and shared between the private and public sectors.

CAREERS sets up a "comprehensive and coordinated labor market information system" that will "project employment opportunities and trends" based on "profiles of employers" and the "education and training of job seekers." The data collection system will record how well the schoolchild did on the "performance assessments" of the state's "goals and objectives" that are part of "Goals 2000," and be so thorough that even the "level of satisfaction of the participants" will be measured and recorded. The premise of the LMIS is the assumption that government committees know what is best for the individual and for the economy. This is the structure under which the Soviets managed their planned economy for so many decades, with Five-Year and Ten-Year Plans that always failed.

Government economic planning is an abysmal failure worldwide, and it's hard to think of anything that would be a bigger detriment to future economic growth. Can you imagine, for example, that any government planning board would have decided in the 1980s that workers needed to be trained for the immense computer and communications industry that has arisen since then?

The third key provision in both Kennedy's "Workforce" bill and McKeon's CAREERS bill is "one-stop career centers" (probably located at public schools). This is where the individual comes in contact with the national economic planning system. Based on economic projections by the different tiers of boards and the vast collection of data on individuals, the "one-stop career center" will train individuals for designated job slots.

The bottom line of these bills is to give the Federal Government the power over every individual's ability to earn a living. If we let the government decide what jobs are "needed," what jobs young people may be trained for, what performance and "outcome" standards may be enforced on schoolchildren, and what certificate qualifies them to be hired, and then track each individual's performance and behavior in school and through the workforce on a national computer data base, we will have lost freedom in America.