Perpetuating Federal Spending on Education

by Phyllis Schlafly May 27, 2011

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The TEA Partiers are demanding that Congress not raise the debt ceiling but instead avoid default by cutting spending dramatically. Federal spending on education emerges as the discretionary item in the federal budget most available for the knife, and a House bill is being introduced by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) that lists 43 education programs to be cut.

We've spent $2 trillion on education since federal aid began in 1965. The specified goals were to improve student achievement, eliminate or narrow the gap between upper-income and low-income students, and increase graduation rates from high school and college.

We have little or nothing to show for the taxpayers' generosity. Even Education Secretary Arne Duncan admitted that 82 percent of public schools should be ranked as failing.

So how will the army of educrats, whose jobs depend on billions of dollars of federal handouts, save their jobs? They've come up with an audacious plan that pretends to be useful in enabling them to discover what works and what doesn't, but it is so large and complicated that it would take years and require a huge computer-savvy payroll and billions of taxpayers' dollars.

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And incidentally, it would be illegal because it's based on using executive-branch regulations to override federal statutes.

This plan calls for a computerized system to track all Americans from cradle to grave by cross-linking all their school and college academic and extra-curricular records, including tests and appraisals by supervisors and peers, with health, welfare, employment, and income data. The data gatherers used to talk about collecting K-12 data, and then they moved to PreK-16, and now their lingo is pre-birth to entry into the workforce.

States already collect a lot of data that have nothing to do with students' academic achievement, including Social Security numbers, family income, medical exams, and criminal and administrative penalties. Now the plan is to enter additional data on preschool experience, pre-natal care, daycare, early childhood education, and after-school activities.

This plan would computerize and combine information not only from the Department of Education, but also from the Department of Health and Human Services (which would include Head Start, WIC (Women, Infants and Children), Parents as Teachers, and after-school programs), and from the Department of Labor. The goal is to give the government access to a giant computer data warehouse with personal information on all children.

This data-gathering plan is another example of the overreaching dictatorial bureaucracy trying to restrict parents' rights over the care and upbringing of their own children. The liberals really mean it when they say they want the village (i.e., the government) to raise and teach children, control their school curriculum, and ultimately decide what adult job they can get.

The people who seek to control the lives and education of our children should be restrained from implementing this plan by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), formerly known as the Buckley Amendment, which passed in 1974. FERPA states that school and college records cannot be disclosed, or transferred to other agencies, without consent of the parents of kids under age 18 or the student if over 18, unless the information is not personally identifiable or other exceptions apply.

Both the No Child Left Behind law, which applies to elementary and secondary schools, and the Higher Education Act, which applies to colleges, reaffirmed FERPA's prohibition on the government developing a national or inter-agency database of personal information on students. But the Obama Administration is now trying to get around FERPA by the subterfuge of having the states build the databases and assign each child a different ID number.

States are bribed to participate in this vast data collection by grants from a pot of federal money and by the threat to withhold other federal grants if states don't comply.

The Obama Administration looks upon schools and colleges as giant reservoirs of young people who can be indoctrinated with "social justice" (i.e., America is somehow an oppressive, unjust society), multiculturalism instead of patriotism, and diversity in moral and immoral behaviors.

The people and groups working to achieve national control of education curriculum view the collection of enormous amounts of personal information about every student on a longitudinal basis, with tracking from "pre-birth" and preschool through post-graduate experience and into the labor force, as the essential path to achieve control of school curriculum and to guide kids' opinions about America.

This type of collection of personal information on all children is the mark of a totalitarian state, not a free America. It is reminiscent of the notorious "dangan" or dossier that Communist China maintains on every citizen (in folders stacked in giant warehouses in the pre-computer age), with complete information on every child through his years of school, which is and then available to his employer when the kid goes into the labor force.