from Phyllis Schlafly

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The Phony Education Bill Bit the Dust

By a single vote, the U.S. Senate tossed into the “circular file” the big “education” boondoggle that Ted Kennedy was trying to foist on the American people and President Bush. The taxpayers can breathe a sigh of relief that the deficit won’t be raised by another $800,000,000 to “pork up” the failed public school establishment.

What the liberals lack in compassion for taxpayers and parents, they make up in skill with semantics. They packaged this bill as the “Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act,” but it wouldn't have “improved” anything and it would have made neighborhoods subservient to a federalized school bureaucracy.

For starters, Kennedy completely removed every provision for parents' choice in schools. Choice is the centerpiece of George Bush's proposals to improve and reform the public schools, and the liberal Democrats would have absolutely none of it, despite growing public demand for choice.

The reason the liberal Democrats won't allow any provision for choice is that the National Education Association (NEA) won't permit it. The NEA has officially endorsed Bill Clinton for President, as well as a majority of Democrats running for Congress this year, and the NEA simply will not tolerate any kind of parents' choice.

A new Gallup Poll just reported that seven out of ten Americans support a voucher system under which parents could send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice. This 70 percent figure is up from 50 percent only a year ago, which shows the Big Mo (momentum) of the parents' choice movement.

This news was greeted by the usual sour-grapes comments from public school spokesmen, who asserted that a voucher plan would “drain badly needed funds from public schools.” That is ridiculous because practically all voucher plans propose giving children a voucher priced at only one-half the cost of keeping a child in public schools, and that means a 50 percent saving to the taxpayers.

But saving money for the taxpayers is not what the public school establishment is all about. The NEA union wants total control over the minds of the children and over ever larger budgets.

Meanwhile, hundreds of children from low-income families are enrolling in private schools for the first time thanks to a boomlet in local voucher programs funded by businesses, private foundations, and individual donors. Pupils in Indianapolis, Atlanta, Little Rock, Milwaukee, San Antonio and other cities are the beneficiaries of a growing movement to provide low-income kids with more choice in education through private money.

The NEA is crying around about the “loss of state aid” for local public schools when private donations enable kids to transfer to private schools. Translated, that means the public schools are angry because taxpayers are SAVING money! It reduces their budgets and their power.

What would the Kennedy education bill actually spend money on if it had passed? In the first year, the bill would funnel 100 percent of the money into the hands of the public school bureaucrats. Nearly one billion new federal dollars would go to feed three new layers of bureaucracy before any money would get to the classroom.

Even House committee chairman Bill Ford admitted, “It' s all cliches and show business. It's not going to revolutionize anything.”

The Kennedy education bill would have allocated funds that could be used for the controversial school-based clinics that dispense contraceptives. The bill would put taxpayer funds into “comprehensive education and social services,” the catch-all code cliche for condom distribution, abortion counseling and referral, psychological counseling, and homosexual outreach all without the knowledge or consent of the parents.

The Kennedy education bill would have established the equivalent of a National School Board called a “National Education Goals Panel,” with a fulltime director and staff. This new bureaucracy would have had the power to establish both the curriculum (“national content standards”) and the manner (national schools delivery system) in which the new curriculum would be taught.

The liberals say, “don’t worry, it’s voluntary,” but the bill required state plans to “provide for the adoption of school delivery standards” as a condition of receiving

a federal grant. That's the liberals' idea of “voluntary,” and it would function as yet another layer of the same education bureaucracy that is responsible for our present failures, trampling on the traditional role of states and loca1 school districts.

The Kennedy education bill would have set up a commission to study ways to teach values. Aren't “values” a good idea? It all depends whose values are being taught. The “values” commission set up in this bill would report to “appropriate committees” of Congress, and Ted Kennedy is chairman of one of those committees.