

Education as a Political Issue

WILL THE NEW CONGRESS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

By SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD, *Author*

Delivered at the United States Taxpayers Party, National Committee Meeting, Reno, Nevada, December 3, 1994

EARLY this morning, as I looked out of my hotel window, I was awed by the sight of a rainbow arched over the city of Reno, a God-given rainbow. Rainbows don't last long, but I hope that it was an omen of better things to come in the cause of educational freedom. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to talk about education as it relates to American politics. Education in America is a political issue. Government education, which not only includes the elementary and secondary public schools, but also the state universities, community colleges, and the many private institutions that receive government grants — all of that government education represents the largest single river of cash flow in America financed by the taxpayer. That's why the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have become the powerful lobbies that they are. The education establishment depends on the taxpayer to maintain its comfortable lifestyle. And so, its grip on the levers of government is vital to its subsistence and survival.

And so, we are dealing with a monster which can be compared to both a dinosaur and an octopus. It resembles a dinosaur because, like that extinct monster, the education establishment has a huge body, a voracious appetite, and a tiny brain. And it is kept alive by a life-support pipeline to the state and federal treasuries. And every year that financial support increases. Its rate of increase may vary from year to year, but in general the amount of money spent on maintaining this monster increases with every federal and state budget. And so, the perennial cry we hear from educators that they are not getting enough money, is a lie. They are getting more than enough money to carry out their function if that function were carried out rationally. But there are more deconstructionists, socialists, new agers, and charlatans in government education today than ever before. And their overlapping agendas require huge amounts of money.

For example, there is something called "educational research," which employs thousands of graduate students and professors of education and costs the taxpayer about a billion dollars a year. I do not know of a single piece of research produced by this group that has in any way improved education in America. All they do is produce contradictory papers, since the sole purpose of educational research is simply to lubricate some group's social agenda.

That the education establishment also resembles an octopus can be confirmed by the fact that Outcome-Based Education, which is now being adopted in state after state, expands the role of government schooling into every facet of family and vocational life. In fact, if I were to describe the instrument most likely to create totalitarianism in America, it would be the government education system. Its concept of lifelong learning expands education far beyond the school building into prenatal care, child rearing, medical social services, job training, psychological counselling — all with

the help of a monster computerized data-collection system in Washington which will monitor the progress and mental health of every American citizen from the womb to the tomb. Should the government of a free people have dossiers on all of its citizens in a huge central computer in Washington? What for?

Which brings us to what happened in America on Tuesday, November 8th. The American people decided that they don't want socialism à la Bill and Hillary Clinton, and they got rid of many liberal Democrats not only in Congress but in governors' mansions and state legislatures. They voted for Republicans, and mainly for conservative Republicans. In Massachusetts, where a liberal Republican ran against Ted Kennedy, Kennedy won. We don't know if a conservative Republican would have won, but he certainly would have done better than Mitt Romney who spent three or four million dollars and got the kind of voter return he could have gotten if he had spent nothing. Which proves that money spent promoting Republican liberalism is a waste.

The new Republican controlled Congress, of course, will have an unparalleled opportunity to do what is right and good for America, that is, scale back the size and cost of government, reduce taxes, repeal bad laws, reduce regulation, and return basic freedoms to the American people. But if the Republican vote on GATT is an indication of what's to come, we may all be sorely disappointed. Let's see if they can close down one single bureaucratic department. Let's see what they do with the Department of Education, for example.

We, of course, in the U.S. Taxpayers Party have adopted in our overall platform the very easily understood notion that the government ought to get out of the education business. What we say is that education, as a service, ought to be a private endeavor and financed by those who use it. Public education was created by people who thought that the government ought to begin planning the lives of its citizens. What we are saying is that citizens have the unalienable right to plan their own lives according to their own personal family or individual wishes. That's all part of the pursuit of happiness.

And we say that because we understand how important education is to the individual in our free society and how corrupting it has become in government hands. And so, the task becomes, how do we get Americans to understand the need to get government out of the education business?

It's a matter of letting Americans know that education without government will be better and cheaper. Better, because private schools must provide good education if they are to remain open, while government schools that fail simply get more money. Cheaper, because private school don't require expensive top-heavy administrators, educational researchers, psychological counsellors, or core evaluators. They spend money on what they do best: teach.

Getting the government out of education is really a two-step process. The first step is to get the federal government out of education. The Republicans can do it if they want to. First, they would have to convince the American people that the costly federal intrusion in education is not only not necessary, but has actually harmed education. There is plenty of evidence to prove this.

Back in 1979, Paul Copperman wrote a book entitled *The Literacy Hoax* in which he showed the correlation between the federal government's intrusion in education and the academic decline that immediately followed. He shows that in 1952, the average SAT verbal score was 476, and in 1962 it was 478. But five years after the enactment of LBJ's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, that score was down to 460. In 1980, it reached 424. In 1994, it was down to 423.

In other words, all of the billions of dollars that the federal government has poured into public education has produced greater affluence for the educators but an academic disaster for the students. This is a dumbing down process if there ever was one. What we are actually witnessing is the shrinking of the American brain. This was corroborated in 1971 by John Gaston, former director of the Human Engineering Laboratory in Fort Worth, who told a columnist from the *Dallas Morning News* (8/26/71):

"The present generation knows less than its parents. All of our laboratories around the country are recording a drop in vocabulary of 1 percent a year. In all our 50 years of testing it's never happened before. . . . Can you imagine what a drop in knowledge of 1 percent a year for 30 years could do to our civilization?"

Well we know what it is doing to our civilization. An increasing number of Americans are reading less and less but watching the boob tube more and more. Even the very smart are getting dumber. For example, in 1972, the number of students who scored between 750 and 800 on the SAT verbal test was 2,817. In 1994 that number was down to 1,438 even though about 28,000 more students took the test in 1994 than in 1972. Where we see the big increase is in the number of students at the very bottom of the scoring chart.

Title One of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was supposed to help the socially disadvantaged learn to read through compensatory education. After spending about 116 billion dollars on Title One for the last 29 years, what do we have to show for it? More illiteracy, not less.

And this Democrat Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, despite its incredible record of failure. And that failure was known as far back as 1974 when a Rand Corporation analysis of Title One reported:

"Without exception, all of the large surveys of the large national compensatory education programs have shown no beneficial results on average as measured by achievement tests or IQ scores."

At this point, I can say without equivocation that I know of no federal education program that has actually improved education. But the proponents of federal aid to education will scream, what about Head Start!

Yes, what about Head Start. Paul Copperman writes:

"The first major independent evaluation of com-

pensatory education was an analysis of Head Start in 1969 by Westinghouse Learning Corp. and Ohio State University. Their study showed that Head Start produced virtually no long-term effects in the students' learning abilities or attitudes toward school. Results for the summer school version of Head Start were so negative that the Westinghouse authors recommended its immediate discontinuation. Some short term gains were recorded as a result of the full-year program, but these gains disappeared by the time the students had completed second grade. Students who had participated in Head Start displayed the same pattern of deficits in reading and arithmetic as comparable students who had not participated."

So there you have it, and I can assure you that nothing has changed since 1969, and we have the test scores to prove it.

Nevertheless, the reauthorization of the ESEA, known as the Improving America's Schools Act, will pump about \$6.9 billion into Title One in 1995. They call it the "new" Title One, the goal of which is to "improve the teaching and learning of children in high-poverty schools to enable them to meet challenging academic content and performance standards." But we know that education reform means whole-language reading instruction, which will produce even more illiteracy, and outcome-based education, which does away with every last vestige of traditional education still remaining in the public schools.

In case you don't know what whole language is, let me tell you what it is in the words of its proponents. The following is taken from a book entitled, *Whole Language: What's the difference?*, published in 1991. The authors write:

"From a whole language perspective, reading . . . is a process of generating hypotheses in a meaning-making transaction in a sociohistorical context. As a transactional process reading is not a matter of 'getting the meaning' from the text, as if that meaning were in the text waiting to be decoded by the reader. Rather, reading is a matter of readers using the cues print provide and the knowledge they bring with them (of language subsystems, of the world) to construct a unique interpretation. Moreover, that interpretation is situated: readers' *creations* (not retrievals) of meaning with the text vary, depending on their purposes for reading and the expectations of others in the reading event. This view of reading implies that there is no single 'correct' meaning for a given text, only plausible meanings."

In case you can't quite grasp the revolutionary nature of what these educators are saying, here's another passage from the same book:

"Whole language represents a major shift in thinking about the reading process. Rather than viewing reading as 'getting the words,' whole language educators view reading as essentially a process of creating meanings. . . . Meaning is created through a transaction with whole, meaningful texts. . . . It is a transaction, not an extraction of the meaning from the print, in the sense that the reader-created meanings are a fusion of what the reader brings and what the text offers.

. . . In a transactional model, words do not have

static meanings. Rather, they have meaning potentials and the capacity to communicate multiple meanings."

No wonder kids are having such a hard time learning to read. And if they can't learn to read by this subjective, make-it-up-as-you-go technique, they are labeled learning disabled which makes the school eligible for all kinds of federal money. What an absolute fraud public education has become!

By the way, privatizing education does not mean neglecting the poor. With the enormous savings in taxes brought about by privatization, communities will have more than enough money to create community education funds to provide tuition for poor children to attend private schools. In private schools they will get the kind of decent education they should be getting now, but aren't.

Obviously, a great case can be made for getting the federal government out of the education business. But this last session of Congress got the federal government so much more deeply involved in education, that it would take a literal revolution to undo it all. And Republicans were willing accomplices.

There was not a single Republican voice that I know of in the Congress willing to expose the federal government's disastrous role in education. Maybe this new Republican controlled Congress will come to grips with this problem and offer such solutions as abolishing the U.S. Department of Education, repealing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 instead of reauthorizing it, and repealing the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The inspiration for that can of worms came from kinder and gentler George Bush.

Do you remember that wonderful Education Summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia, in September 1989 attended by then-President Bush and 50 state governors? That's where it was decided to federalize public education by setting National Education Goals. Back in 1989 it sounded like a lot of symbolic hot air, the kind that politicians love to emit in large quantity. But in March 1994, Congress compressed that hot air into statute. Recently, a Toolkit was published by the government to help sell the new Goals to a somewhat skeptical public. It states:

"The Goals 2000: Educate America Act is considered to be the most sweeping federal education legislation in decades." The Goals offer "clear, concise and ambitious targets stating the education results we seek to achieve. The Goals span a lifetime of learning."

In case you don't know what the goals are, here they are in brief:

By the year 2000, (1) all children in America will start school ready to learn; (2) the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent; (3) American students will have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter and will be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment; (4) U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science; (5) every adult American will be literate and ready to compete in a global economy; (6) every school in America will be free of drugs and violence; (7) teachers will have access to more professional development; (8) parents and families will form partnerships with their schools.

Inasmuch as the year 2000 is only five years away, how realistic are these pie-in-the-sky goals? Our politicians seem to be living in a fantasy world. But for the American people it's a very expensive fantasy.

Will the new Republican controlled Congress have the courage to tell it like it is? Will they repeal Goals 2000? The *Boston Globe* of Nov. 18th reported that Rep. Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania, who will probably become chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, has announced that all federal education programs will be reviewed to see whether they should be retained, consolidated or scrapped. It will be a very interesting 1995. Of course, they should all be scrapped, for the federal government has no business being in education.

Meanwhile, you should know that the Toolkit, which will be used by the change agents to brainwash Americans into accepting fantasy instead of reality, was authorized and published by the National Education Goals Panel which is made up of 8 state governors, 2 members of the federal executive branch, 4 members of Congress, and 4 state legislators. Five of the eight governors are Republicans, including John R. McKernan, Jr., of Maine, Arne H. Carlson of Minnesota, Jim Edgar of Illinois, John Engler of Michigan, and Michael Leavitt of Utah.

Will they be in favor of getting rid of Goals 2000? John Engler is supposed to be a conservative!

The Republicans are divided, and because of this, the conservative revolution is bound to falter. Rush Limbaugh came out for GATT. This has caused dismay among many dittoheads. This in itself has provided the U.S. Taxpayers Party with a great opportunity to make its case known and clear the air. It's obvious that the battle for the soul of the Republican party has just begun. The levers of power are still in the hands of the New World Order crowd although of late they have avoided using that loaded terminology.

There are, of course, many issues the U.S. Taxpayers Party can emphasize in its effort to gain support. But I believe that the education issue is one that we ought to embrace and run with. There already exists in America a national homeschool movement with organizations in all fifty states. These organizations represent parents and children who have opted out of the public system, made a clear break with the humanist institutions of the state, and made the brave decision to strike out on their own, like those early pioneers who pushed into the wilderness with their covered wagons. They represent the best in our American tradition of individual freedom and family values. These people are the natural constituents of a national party that wants to get the government out of the education business.

But I fear that the great Republican victory will give many the mistaken notion that we've won the war for conservatism, and that we might as well leave it all up to Rush Limbaugh and Newt Gingrich to set things right, and get back to what we enjoy doing most, leading our private lives. That's what essentially happened during the Reagan years. And boy were we fleeced!

I think the Republican victory should make us all the more aware of what can go wrong, despite the public's reluctance to support a third party. Which is why we, the leaders of the movement, should not in any way withhold our criticism of Republican politicians when they forget why they were elected.

But the most important reason for getting rid of government education is the fact that it is ruining the intellectual and spiritual lives of its captive students. Since the 1960s, the Third Force psychologists — that is, those psychologists who have wedded humanism to behaviorism — have remade the curriculum so that “critical thinking” has become the key concept behind all that is taught.

William Coulson says that Critical Thinking means criticizing your folks. But the true aim of critical thinking is to destroy the student’s faith in absolute values. This is done by using the dialectic, which is supposed to “liberate” the student from absolutes. The first step in the liberation process is to bring the student into a state of doubt and that is done by asking questions, which is part and parcel of values clarification. “Why do you think you feel that way?” the student is asked. “How do you think you arrived at that view?” “Look at the options.” “Have you considered the alternatives?”

This is the dialectical process that starts in kindergarten and goes right through the twelfth grade. No wonder so many young Americans are morally and spiritually confused and subject to all kinds of corrupting influences. You have to understand that the process is calculated to turn a Bible believing child into a rebellious, pagan teenager.

So when you hear or see the phrase “critical thinking,” you should know that the educators are talking about the dialectic technique of destroying the child’s faith.

That’s why content is irrelevant in Outcome-Based Education. What counts in OBE is the student’s ability to demonstrate his or her mastery of the dialectical process.

So government education is also a cultural issue and a religious issue. You can see why evolution is such an important part of the education plan, why the Ten Commandments had to be removed, why teaching about the

Bible-believing Founding Fathers is now passé, why multiculturalism is stressed. Multiculturalism teaches that all values systems are equally valid and equally true, which means that they are all equally false.

What I am saying is that our government schools, supported by billions in taxes, are destroying the heritage given to us by our Founding Fathers. Newt Gingrich, on C-Span last night, stressed the importance of the Declaration of Independence as the document that clearly delineates America’s governmental philosophy.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all man are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

There you have in those few sentences the complete philosophy of government of the Founding Fathers. The purpose of government is to secure, to safeguard, the unalienable rights of the citizens. How far has our present government strayed from that basic purpose! We have government schools trying to mold our children into servants of the state. We have public servants acting more like the public’s masters. And both major parties have permitted this to happen.

That is why the U.S. Taxpayers Party is more needed than ever. Our education platform reflects our basic belief in a smaller, less intrusive government, one that secures the rights of its citizens. The new Congress will have the opportunity to prove that it also believes in the philosophy of government so eloquently and succinctly defined in the Declaration. And it can easily start doing so by dismantling the federal education establishment.