



## Education and Politics

As I've said in previous articles, education is the orphan issue of this presidential campaign. Why? Because the subject is too complex and too volatile to be decently handled in the kind of debates that Gov. Romney and President Obama have been engaged in. There is simply not enough time to do the subject justice. Besides, both Romney and Obama believe that the federal government has a role to play in public education: Obama a lot more; Romney a little less, but not enough difference to make it a hot issue.



Yet, as we all know, the future of America will be largely determined by how we educate American children. The present government education system, now largely empowered by the federal government's largesse, is atheist, behaviorist, and academically corrupt. It is the worst kind of education system for a free people who are in the vast majority believers in biblical religion. All of the reforms being pushed by so-called conservatives such as Jeb Bush are leading toward the final construction of a national education system in which local taxpayers will have as little power as possible to control their local schools. They may have control over parking spaces, and the creation of charter schools, but that seems to be what all of this is leading to.

The road to a national education system began in 1965 with Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which opened the coffers of the U.S. Treasury to the grubby hands of the educators. They wanted more money — billions more — and they got it, courtesy of liberal Democrats and a liberal president. But it was the beginning of the incremental march toward a national education system. That is what the National Education Association always wanted. They had said as much in their very first meeting in 1857 in Philadelphia where the presidents of 10 state teachers associations gathered to create a national body. Thomas W. Valentine, president of the New York Teachers Association, told the delegates:

Twelve years ago [1845], in the Empire State, the first state association of teachers in this country was formed.... Previous to this organization teachers everywhere were almost entirely unacquainted with each other. But what a mighty change a few years have wrought! Besides many minor organizations, there are now not less than twenty-three state teachers associations, each doing good work in its own sphere of labor, and today I trust we shall proceed to raise the capstone which shall bind all together in one, solid substantial structure....

What we want is an association that shall embrace all the teachers of our whole country, which shall hold its meetings at such central points as shall accommodate all sections and combine all interests. And we need this not merely to promote the interests of our own profession, but to gather up and arrange the educational statistics of our country, so that the people may know what is really being done for public education, and yet remains to be done. I trust the time will come when our government will have its educational department just as it now has one for agriculture, for the



interior, for the navy, etc.

Thus, the teachers were setting out to do what local state control of public education made impossible: create the basis of a national system of education. While the educators held up as their ideal the Prussian system which was national and centralized, such centralization was impossible in this country. But by organizing themselves nationally, the teachers could at least gain some of the professional benefits of a national system. Thus it should come as no surprise that the call for a federal department of education was made at this very first organizational meeting. The Prussians had a Ministry of Education, so why shouldn't Americans have one as well?

But the resistance of a freedom-loving people to such a concentration of power by the educators prevented any real progress toward the final aim of a Prussian-style national system. In the meanwhile, the NEA became a forum in which all of the vital educational issues of the time were aired: public versus private education; secularism versus religion; the role of government in education; teacher training and philosophies of education; curriculum content; discipline; school financing — problems which are still with us today and just as insoluble as they were then.

Today, the National Education Association is a labor union with about 3.3 million members, including teachers, school support staff, administrators, and higher education staff. It is the single largest government-employee union in the country. Its left-wing, progressive agenda has turned it into a political monster with tentacles in every school district in the nation. It provides the largest single group of delegates to the national convention of the Democrat Party. It fervently favors the reelection of President Barack Obama.

Of course, there are teachers who will vote for Gov. Romney. But they don't particularly make themselves known in an organization so heavily committed to the agenda of the far Left. Indeed, the NEA can easily be called the Socialist Party of America.

It was the progressives who first advanced the idea that teachers should seek power in order to transform America into a socialist society. Professor George S. Counts of Teachers College, Columbia University, put it quite bluntly in his 1932 book, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* He wrote: "That the teachers should deliberately reach for power and then make the most of their conquest is my firm conviction."

Counts had been to Russia and seen communism in action. He was thrilled by what he had seen. But he saw no possibility of a Russian-style revolution in the United States. The process would have to be evolutionary, with the schools playing the major role. Ironically, in later life, Counts became an anti-communist and a strong denouncer of dictator Josef Stalin.

That teachers should become politically active was an idea being promoted by the Left. It was also advanced by Stephen K. Bailey, dean of the graduate school of citizenship and public affairs at Syracuse University. In an article entitled "Education Is A Political Enterprise," published in the November 1964 *NEA Journal*, he wrote:

If Education is to receive the moral and financial support of citizens, political forces must be mobilized in its behalf.... Education is one of the most thoroughly political enterprises in American life. More public money is spent for education than for any other single function of state and local government.... It is evident that effective political leadership is the keystone to the arch of educational finance.

Today, the Democrat Party is greatly dependent on the support of the teachers' unions to get their



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on October 19, 2012

candidates elected at all levels of government — local, state, and national. According to Mallory Factor's new book *Shadowbosses*, on the power of government-employee unions, the NEA has made over \$88 million in direct grants to left-wing organization and projects. They gave \$100,000 to Media Matters, the George Soros-funded liberal organization dedicated to targeting "right-wing media bias." They gave \$110,000 to the Center for American Progress, another Soros-funded radical-Left think tank. The NEA, of course, is well known for its financial support of liberal political candidates. Mallory Factor writes:

The two national teachers unions [NEA and AFT] are two of the largest unions of any type in our country. Not coincidentally, they are also among the largest financial contributors to Democrat Party politics. Their grubby fingerprints are all over America's dysfunctional education system, all over Congress, and all over the Obama Administration.... With their immense dues income, teachers unions extend their political influence across all fifty states, even the right-to-work states.... Worst of all, teachers unions keep many of our kids in failing school systems and give them very few real chances for success.

And the future of America depends on what goes on in these union-controlled schools! Yet, the subject will hardly get notice in this political season. That's because the Democrats are very satisfied with the present status quo and don't want to open the subject to debate, and the Republican establishment is brain-dead when it comes to this issue. George Bush gave us No Child Left Behind and Obama has given us Race to the Top. Both are extensions and expansions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, President Johnson's gift to his education supporters. When he signed it into law, he said that it would be a permanent part of American law. And so far he's been right. No president, Republican or Democrat, has tried to get rid of it even though it has added to the corruption of the American curriculum. Mallory Factor writes:

Our children, who are our nation's future, are literally playing the lottery to determine whether they will receive a decent education. The teachers unions are keeping our school system disastrously bad, because the current system works fine for the unions. The teachers unions won't allow bad teachers to be fired. The teachers unions insist on arbitrary standards for pay, like years at the desk and degrees achieved, and won't allow teachers to be paid for merit and performance. Worst of all, the teachers unions indoctrinate our students with a leftist agenda, creating new unionists in the process.

And there is no doubt that this indoctrination has been very effective. The other day I engaged a young computer repairman in conversation about his education. I asked him what was the difference between socialism and capitalism. He said that socialism was concerned about everyone and that capitalism was concerned about a few. He had been well taught by his leftist teachers.

What does all of this mean? If Obama is reelected, it will simply give the teachers unions what they want: more power and a lot more money. If Romney is elected, it may give conservatives the opportunity to influence the Congress and put pressure on the White House on ways of getting the federal government out of the education business, and restoring control of public schools to the local communities. No easy task. A President Romney would have to be told how destructive to America's future is our present dysfunctional education system, and why he should, with the help of a conservative, constitutionalist Congress (should we elect one), make reforms in public education that make sense. Otherwise, we are cooked. As I noted in my previous article, ["Why Ronald Reagan Couldn't Abolish the Department of Education"](#): "Indeed, the next president of the United States will have to be



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judged on how he handles our failed public education system. Will he be able to do something about it, or will he, like Reagan, also be a prisoner of the Establishment?" The reader, after studying Romney's record as governor of Massachusetts, can answer that question for himself.

The issue of government-employee unions is another issue that has been largely ignored in this campaign, even though it made headlines in Wisconsin. But it is an issue that will have to be dealt with by the American electorate. With their bargaining rights — a crude form of blackmail — high pay, and lucrative pension plans, the unions are bleeding the taxpayer and creating massive public debt. We can no longer afford such lavish luxuries. The teachers unions have wrecked American education, and as long as they have their supporters in Congress, nothing will change.



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