



On the Defensive, Shills for Common Core Hype Distractions

With opposition to [Obama administration-backed Common Core](#) nationalized education boiling over [across the political spectrum](#), desperate lawmakers in Wisconsin who support the controversial scheme — even after devastating testimony exposed myriad flaws with the standards — are trying fiendishly to distract from real issues by inventing conspiracy theories and attacking respected experts. The attempt by a trio of Common Core-supporting Democrats in the state to impugn top authorities on the standards, however, is backfiring in spectacular fashion. Now, calls for the lawmakers to explain themselves and resign are growing.



The three state legislators who released public statements or letters trying to deflect attention from the facts about Common Core using false allegations about the messengers were: State Rep. Sondy Pope, State Sen. John Lehman, and State Rep. Christine Sinicki. All of them offered easily debunked misinformation and bizarre theories suggesting some sort of vast right-wing conspiracy was afoot. The trio is now at the center of a political firestorm in the state, however. [Multiple media outlets](#) and some of the experts are highlighting the absurdity of the bogus claims — and the apparent effort to put the focus on anything and everything aside from the facts about Common Core.

In a letter to the leadership of the state committee investigating the standards, for example, Rep. Pope and Sen. Lehman falsely suggested that testimony from some of the nation's top authorities on Common Core was "funded" by a group associated with the "extremist fringe" [John Birch Society](#). Doubling down on the wild conspiracy theories, the two Democrats went on to claim, falsely, that the prominent experts who testified were somehow "fronting" for "notorious groups" and "right-wing extremism." Of course, none of the witnesses were doing anything of the sort, but that did not stop the lawmakers from further embarrassing themselves.

"We are certainly disappointed that this fringe organization has been invited by you to represent theoretically 'mainstream' opposition to the well-reasoned Common Core Standards," state Rep. Pope and state Sen. Lehman continued in their letter. "With reasonable conservative voices available to discuss this issue, we hope that invitations to groups affiliated with the John Birch Society are not indicative of the agenda driving our committee's work." It was not immediately clear which alleged invitations to groups affiliated with the John Birch Society the seemingly confused lawmakers were referring to.

Aside from the half-baked effort to distract the public from the [escalating controversies around Common Core](#), the biggest problem with the claims, critics say, is that the allegations and conspiracy theories are simply not true. In reality, as the lawmakers would have known if they had paid attention to



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the [testimony](#), the nationally recognized experts were reimbursed for modest travel and lodging expenses — not paid — by small donations literally collected in a hat from Wisconsin parents, grandparents, and activists. Multiple witnesses explained all of that during the hearings, and the actual hat used to gather the funds was given to state Sen. Lehman after his outbursts.

For more details about the reimbursement, see a recent article in *The New American* headlined: "[Common Core: People vs. Big Government, Big Business, and Billionaires](#)." In brief: Attempting to counter biased testimony by vested interests funded by billionaires such as Bill Gates and taxpayer bribes from the Obama administration offered to state officials in exchange for imposing Common Core, concerned Wisconsinites began gathering donations. The American Opinion Foundation, a legally independent educational entity with Birchers on its board, then consolidated the miniscule funds collected from locals and wrote checks to reimburse the experts.



In light of the lawmakers' factually challenged letter, one of the experts who testified against the standards at a recent hearing is demanding that state Sen. Lehman resign from his position immediately. Dr. Gary Thompson (shown at left), a child psychologist based in Utah who said he campaigned for Obama, released a [scathing letter](#) that was promptly picked up by [multiple media outlets](#). In it, he lambastes the disgraced state senator for his bogus claims and for ignoring the real issues described during the [testimony](#): "The bi-partisan, corporate-influenced policies of greed that are cognitively and emotionally abusive to our children."

"On behalf of every African American, Latino, Autistic, gifted, depressed, anxious and learning-disabled child in the state of Wisconsin, I demand your immediate resignation from public office," wrote Dr. Thompson in the open letter. "Your manipulative, race/religion-baiting, sociopathic, misleading press release is a textbook example of what is wrong with American politics and is clearly a window into the mind of a warped individual who values the spotlight over serious discussions related to our nation's children."

Dr. Thompson noted that the state senator was offered "clear, irrefutable, empirically based, credible evidence — from an impartial Doctor of Clinical Psychology who hates politics — that the testing practices you support under the Common Core Standards are experimental in nature, and that continuing down this path has a high statistical chance of screwing up the academic and emotional lives of African-American, Latino, autistic, gifted, anxious, depressed, and learning-disabled children in Wisconsin and beyond." Instead, Sen. Lehman harped on silly conspiracy theories.

The clinical psychologist also pointed out that he came to testify of his own free will, without receiving a penny for his time or testimony, because he believes so strongly in "the need to stand up on behalf of children." Rather than focusing on the enormous implications of the testimony and what it means for students in Wisconsin, however, Sen. Lehman chose to express "passionate concern" over who paid for Thompson's coach airfare and his two-star hotel stay. "So I have to ask with all sincerity, my brother, what the hell is wrong with you cognitively and emotionally?" wrote Dr. Thompson, who serves as vice president of operations and clinical education at Early Life Child Psychological & Educational Services.

"Given the seriousness of what was alleged during a Senate Hearing from an impartial Doctor of Psychology, the vast majority of Wisconsin and American citizens really do not give a damn about who paid for my costs," he continued. "What we as parents do give a damn about, and will be waiting with baited breath for, is your official response as an elected state senator to the allegations made regarding



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our children under your care.”

“Republican, Democrat, Independent, Christian, and Atheist parents are not fooled by your callous and sick need for attention at the expense of issues facing minority and special education children under your legislative care,” said Dr. Thompson. “On a personal note, you would not be in this uncomfortable situation if you had an ounce of the character, fortitude and love of country that the people who contributed to my expense check exhibit in droves.”

The theme of Dr. Thompson’s testimony before the state committee was “[Our Children Are Bigger Than This](#)” — apparently a notion that did not resonate with the three lawmakers. Among other key points, Dr. Thompson testified that the controversial standards could prove to be disastrous — especially for special-needs, gifted, and minority children. The national testing regime being developed with federal taxpayer funds is particularly troubling, the expert explained.

“Your callous disregard surrounding the issues of child abuse and the struggles of minority and special needs children in public schools in Wisconsin will be forever memorialized on the Internet,” Dr. Thompson concluded, pointing to a TV news clip that referred to the state senator’s “bizarre” comments. “Although I do not share identical political philosophies with ‘these people [who reimbursed expenses],’ I do have a lot to learn from them in terms of becoming better informed with what is going on in this country, and having the courage and fortitude to fight for the health and welfare of our nation’s children.”

The New American reached out to state Sen. Lehman for comment, but nobody returned messages. A staffer who answered the phone later said Lehman was not in the office today. It was not immediately clear whether the state senator planned to resign in the face of rapidly escalating criticism about his now-debunked claims and bizarre behavior. Other media outlets that tried to contact the lawmaker also reported that he has not responded to requests for comment.

Everyday citizens, though, are demanding explanations as well. In an open letter about the brouhaha, Wisconsinites Ruth Elmer and Edward Perkins described the ongoing battle as a struggle between David and Goliath — “our tiny little sum against the Gates Foundation’s millions; the efforts of concerned parents, grandparents and other concerned citizens against a supremely wealthy foundation that has busily been buying a path forward for CCSS over the past few years.”

The controversial Gates Foundation, of course, has [poured upwards of \\$150 million into developing and promoting Common Core](#). “Yet, somehow, we, along with [American Opinion Foundation Executive Director] Alan Scholl and AOF (and by association JBS), which functioned as nothing more than a bank for the collection and disbursement of our modest funds, are painted as the suspicious characters, the extremists ... the bad guys,” the citizen activists wrote. “Those advancing CCSS in this state must have a lot to hide to engage in tactics of this nature. We don’t. We think Sen. Lehman, Rep. Pope, and Rep. Sinicki owe us — and the concerned citizens of Wisconsin — an explanation.”

With Wisconsin just one of many Common Core battlegrounds across America, it has become increasingly clear that the nationwide fight is really between concerned citizens and parents on one side — and Big Government, Big Business, and certain agenda-driven establishment billionaires such as Gates on the other. The powerful special interests promoting the controversial national standards may have [billions of dollars to work with, most of it extracted from taxpayers](#). Those promoting local control, accountability, and proper education, however, have a passion and love for their children that can never be matched with mere money. No amount of conspiracy theories or attacks can change that.



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Lawmakers and policymakers should side with the people.

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