



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 13, 2014

Wisconsin Republicans Accused of Sabotaging Common Core Bill

Even though the [national Republican Party](#) has officially rejected the [Obama administration-pushed Common Core nationalization of education](#), a handful of GOP figures in Wisconsin are being accused of sabotaging legislation that would have created a panel to review the controversial standards — and potentially kill them. As the national and statewide uprising against the [dubious new federally backed education regime](#) grows, however, lawmakers and activists in Wisconsin told *The New American* that the fight is far from finished.



Due to alleged obstruction by some powerful Republican lawmakers — especially the chairs of the education committees — a bill to kill Common Core entirely never went anywhere this legislative session. Despite the Republican National Committee [having unanimously adopted a resolution blasting](#) the “one size fits all” educational scheme as “an inappropriate overreach to standardize and control the education of our children,” even compromise legislation appears to be going nowhere this session due to the efforts of a handful of Wisconsin GOP legislators.

The SB 619 legislation to review Common Core, introduced after a [public outcry over the scheme](#) that transcends traditional political divides, would have created a panel of parents and educators to study the standards. One of the primary motivations for the review, supporters of the bill said, is to allow some public input, which critics say has been almost entirely lacking. The panel would have also been tasked with writing new standards if Common Core was found to be inappropriate, as [opponents and countless experts contend](#).

Now, with the legislature set to go out of session in a matter of weeks, lawmakers and sources at the Capitol say even the review bill is on “life support” at best. However, virtually nobody expects the outrage surrounding the controversial national standards to fade away any time soon. In fact, if the [experiences of other states](#) that adopted Common Core offer any indication, the uproar is likely to intensify quickly in the coming months.

“Real opposition and motivation starts once the tests start,” said Jason Rostan from the office of Sen. Leah Vukmir, a leading supporter of efforts to rein in the nationalization and dumbing down of Wisconsin’s education standards. “This issue is not going away by any stretch of the imagination, but it might have to wait until the next session.”

Adopted in 2010 by Wisconsin officials with [massive bribes from the Obama administration’s “stimulus,”](#) Common Core has come under heavy fire from teachers, unions, parents, experts, activists, and more [all across the political spectrum](#). In a series of hearings held across the state, [experts](#), [educators](#), and [parents](#) lambasted the national standards from all angles as government employees, some of whom



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were told their jobs were being “saved” by the stimulus-funded Common Core bribes, defended them. In other states — [most recently in the establishment stronghold of New York](#) — the deafening public outcry against Common Core has forced officials to retreat, at least temporarily. One state lawmaker with an education degree even described Common Core to *The New American* last month as “state-sponsored child abuse.” Across the country, the uprising against the standards, widely criticized as “ObamaCore,” continues to gain momentum.

Lawmakers in Wisconsin [got more than an earful from the public](#), too. “We heard concerns from people statewide about what they see as problems with the Common Core standards,” Wisconsin Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt, who chaired a special committee on Common Core, told *The New American*. National education experts, including two who served on the Common Core Validation Committee, also [lambasted the standards at the hearings](#).

“There’s been a lot of money and time spent on [Common Core in Wisconsin], and in order to replace the standards, there has to be an organized process,” Rep. Thiesfeldt continued. “What we came up with was this bill to review standards and do it in the light of day, so the public can see what is going on, which is not what occurred with the Common Core standards.”

As of a couple weeks ago, Rep. Thiesfeldt said, “all the legislative parties involved seemed to be in agreement that this bill was the direction we were going to head.” Then, something happened. “All of the sudden some objections emerged from the head of the Education Committee in the Senate who said there was not enough support and he didn’t like it anymore,” the Republican lawmaker said.

“Regardless of anybody’s concern or lack of concern over Common Core, we all as Americans know full well that any time we give the federal government control over something, that is not power we’re going to get back again,” Rep. Thiesfeldt explained, adding that it was not a positive step and that each state serving as a laboratory with others learning along the way was preferable to centralization. “Even though the people who pushed through Common Core seem to have found a way to push through national standards legally, I do believe there was coercion of the states on what the national department of education wanted them to do.”

While Wisconsin is a [local control state](#), meaning school districts can adopt whatever standards they choose, state officials, apparently with the blessing of Republican Gov. Scott Walker, are mandating a Common Core-aligned test. Only one district so far has rejected the national standards. The reason: Experts and lawmakers say the federally funded so-called “Smarter Balance” assessment essentially coerces local education officials into complying with Common Core, albeit indirectly.

Last week, the Wisconsin Senate Education Committee held a hearing about the legislation to scrutinize and potentially drop Common Core in the state. Sources close to the action at the state Capitol, however, told *The New American* that a handful of Republicans had worked to “sabotage” the bill and “rig” the hearings in favor of pro-national standards forces — primarily taxpayer-funded government education officials instructed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to testify against the measure.

Aside from Gov. Walker, who spoke out publicly against Common Core but has done little to stop it, the two lawmakers taking the most heat are Republican state Sen. Luther Olsen and GOP state Rep. Steve Kestell, who chair the education committees in their respective houses. “The Assembly blames the Senate who blames the Assembly,” one source close to the issue who asked not to be named told *The New American*. “It’s part of the Kestell and Olsen game. One puts conditions on the other who then puts



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conditions on another. Then they cite each other as the reason that they can't do anything."

Critics of the "rigged" hearings — at least two sources at the Capitol said they had never seen anything like it — argued that the chairman, state Sen. Olsen, had run it in a way aimed at creating the false impression of public support for Common Core. Wisconsin activists not able to attend, for example, complained that they were not able to submit their views on "hearing slips" — as many as 1,500 or even 2,000 by some estimates — creating a bogus perception about the level of support for the legislation.

Activists and insiders also accused Chairman Olsen of largely putting Common Core opponents at the end of the line for testifying, with many having to leave before expressing their thoughts. Pro-national standards government employees on the taxpayers' dime, meanwhile, were overwhelmingly allowed to testify first, while reporters were present, attendees said. Numerous other complaints about the "biased" hearing have also been expressed.

Citizens and parents were furious, vowing to target the GOP legislators at the next election — or even before, with talk of a potential recall gaining steam. Outrage was especially directed at Sen. Olsen, whose wife works in the state's government-education apparatus, whom they view as at least partially responsible for stopping the review bill.

More than a few lawmakers were critical of the hearing and other machinations as well. "About two hours prior to the hearing, the Senate education chair had announced through the Associated Press that there were five GOP Senators opposed to the bill," noted state Rep. Thiesfeldt in a phone interview. "That gave the appearance that this had no chance of passing."

"When the hearing was actually held — perhaps 100 or 150 attendees — had received word from state DPI to show up at the hearing and object to the bill," he continued. "It is highly likely that all of these came to the hearing 'on the clock,' which means taxpayers paid. Citizens paid their own way to get there. Largely, the concerns of those common individuals were just dismissed by the chairman of the committee. Many were forced to sit there for 6 to 7 hours to testify even though they were there first."

Separately, he added, hundreds of slips showing support for the bill were rejected by the committee chairman. "So the impression was given that the majority was opposed to the bill," Thiesfeldt added, echoing widespread concerns expressed by activists, lawmakers, parents, and Wisconsin political insiders. "At this point, unfortunately, I think their tactics have been successful and the bill is at best on life support right now."

Others who spoke with *The New American* were outraged by the hearing and what they viewed as rampant bias and deception to achieve a predetermined outcome. State Sen. Olsen, though, defended it, saying the hearing was fair and entirely unbiased. "We never invited anybody to come and testify. I had no say in who came," he told *The New American* in a phone interview. "I know DPI sent out e-mails asking superintendents to come, but we had nothing to do with that."

On the controversy over refusing to accept the "hearing slips," Sen. Olsen pointed to the Senate rules. "What we did was just to follow the Senate rules handbook," he said before reading the relevant section of the handbook out loud.

Regarding the statements made to the AP reporter, Sen. Olsen dismissed the concerns. "I was just on my way down and I ran into the reporter, who I know well, so I told him that I knew of five Republican senators who weren't going to support it," he said. "But I never said it was dead."

Sen. Olsen also said that there were plenty of people who did not view the hearing as rigged or biased.



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“Somebody called me and said you were so polite to the people who were for and against it,” he continued. “We let anyone talk as long as they wanted to, the only thing I asked was that people be mindful of those testifying behind them.”

“For people to say that I showed bias, it’s like, guys, get in the real world,” he added. “This was a very fair, respectful hearing, and we never shut anybody down.”

Supporters and opponents of the bill to review Common Core in the open largely agree that, while it is not out of the question, the legislation has little hope of going anywhere this session. On both sides, lawmakers said local school districts could refuse to accept the controversial standards. With the federally funded Common Core-aligned test having already been approved with Republican support, though, that may prove difficult.

“I would not be surprised if in the next 6 months or so, they will use much the same process to adopt the science standards,” explained state Rep. Thiesfeldt, referring to the secretive, top-down bureaucratic approach employed with Common Core being used to foist the related, [extremely controversial “science” component](#) on Wisconsin as well. “If parents are concerned, they need to get down to their local school boards and express those concerns, and they need to do it in large numbers.”

State Department of Public Instruction boss Tony Evers, a fervent supporter of Common Core, has been among the most important players in foisting the standards on Wisconsin. However, despite his claims, lawmakers could certainly rein in his bureaucracy and its ongoing efforts to defend “ObamaCore” from an outraged public at all costs.

“He has perceived his office as having the sole authority to adopt standards and that the legislature doing something would be unconstitutional,” state Rep. Thiesfeldt, pointing to [past public statements made by Evers](#). “I believe he is absolutely incorrect and the legislature does have the authority to define his job responsibilities.”

Of course, lawmakers and activists largely agree that the governor might be the key to stopping Common Core — especially if he chooses to take strong action and work to replace the national testing regime funded by the Obama administration’s Department of Education. So far, critics say he has been on both sides of the issue, which could be politically toxic as Common Core becomes a lightning rod for public fury nationwide.

At this point, national, state, and local grassroots activists and organizations opposed to the national education regime are considering their options in Wisconsin. Many feel betrayed after working so hard for Gov. Walker and even some of the Republican lawmakers accused of trying to foist Common Core on the state. Multiple efforts are already underway to hold elected officials accountable. Virtually everyone, though, agrees that the battle is far from finished.

Photo of Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin

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