



Give ‘NC-LBJ’ an ‘F’

By Jim Waters

When President George W. Bush signed into law “No Child Left Behind” six years ago, I thought we were finally on track to improve education.

Boy, was I wrong. How did I get snookered into believing that a massive government-spawned education program could result in meaningful change in public schools? Common sense went on vacation that day.

Meanwhile, the debate rages as to whether the framers of the Constitution intended for the government to force education policies – like NCLB – on the people.

Some say the Constitution’s references to “the general welfare” of the nation could include government running public schools. I don’t buy it.

The word “education” never appears in the Constitution, and for good reason: The founders didn’t consider it the purview of the government. Period. Education fell to the states and local government.

Better yet, philosopher John Locke believed parental control would work best. And our founders held Locke and his views in high regard when they wrote the Constitution.

“The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it,” Locke wrote.

Labor bosses at the “anti-choice” Kentucky teachers union probably don’t much care for Locke’s views. He believed “the welfare and prosperity of the nation” depends on the “well educating” of children. But, he said, that assignment belongs to parents, not government.

If the founders considered public education an important role for the federal government, they would have made it crystal clear. We’re not left to guess about other important roles for government – such as if it should defend us against foreign invaders. The Constitution clearly states it must.

Certainly if the founders wanted government micromanaging public education, the Constitution would state it. It doesn’t.

Complicating matters is the failure of states to improve education, except in small amounts. But in Kentucky, such miniscule improvements get billed by bureaucrats as great achievements.

In contrast, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports only 30 percent of Kentucky’s students meet proficiency standards, meaning they do quality work at grade level. The story is similar throughout the United States.

Kentucky's CATS assessment offers a much rosier picture than the national measurement. But I get suspicious when the rose patch lacks thorns. It makes me think those roses might be fake.

Kentuckians who don't understand that government cannot solve all – or even most – of our problems hear the depressing news about the state's progress on improving education and yell, "If Frankfort's not going to do it, then Washington should. Government should *do something!*"

After getting an earful from unhappy parents and taxpayers throughout the country, government did something, all right. It created another failed attempt to fix education. It's an expensive "fix," too.

To understand this, remember the "No Child" law actually was a reauthorization of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Education and Secondary Education Act of 1965. That bill gave the federal government a historically huge – and unprecedented – amount of control over education money. It also made up part of LBJ's "Great Society" program.

Johnson did some commendable work in other areas like civil rights. But he was a profligate spender. And he opened the floodgates for Washington to spend on education like a crook with someone else's credit card.

The Digest of Education Statistics shows that real federal spending on K-12 education proliferated like nuclear weapons – \$9 million in 1965 to nearly \$68 billion in 2005. Bush's spending requests for the education bureaucracy increased more than 70 percent between 2002 and 2005.

Just call this "NC-LBJ!"

Incredulously, big-spending politicians and education bureaucrats – including some in Kentucky – claim spending on Bush's boondoggle *isn't enough!* But here's what you must understand: For them, government funding of education or social programs will *never* be enough.

Plus, these big spenders don't acknowledge the need for parental choice, merit pay for teachers and accurate assessments of academic performance. For them, it's about money, power and protecting the status quo.

Meanwhile, 70 percent of our students get left behind. Anyone else had *enough* of that?

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