



# Family Concerns

"Bridging the Information Gap"

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## **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND MEETING: FRUSTRATION AT "GOVERNMENT MANDATES"**

*Irony revealed as education leaders call for "local control"*

CWA of Kansas attended a recent meeting called by Third District Representative Dennis Moore (D) to discuss "No Child Left Behind" the newest version of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). I was not sure what to expect judging from the people represented on the panel. Representative Moore's panelists were Dr. David Benson, the superintendent of the Blue Valley School District, Dr. Andy Tompkins, Kansas Commissioner of Education, Lisa Elliot representing the Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) and John Vratil, Kansas senator. Rep. Moore kicked the meeting off with remarks about how national defense was the number one priority of the federal government. Education is also a very important issue as reflected in the massive federal dollars poured into educating our children. However, according to Rep. Moore the "No Child Left Behind" version of ESEA was inadequate to address educational problems in the United States. "No Child Left Behind" calls for testing of children at regular intervals as a method of making schools accountable, and it also mandates teacher competency as well as educational competency requirements for paraprofessionals who aid children in activities and who provide help for special needs children. Over and over each panelist complained that schools were not getting enough money to comply with the federal mandates in the time allotted to them.

### **Dr. Benson speaks out**

Dr. David Benson stated that nobody argues with the stated goals of "No Child Left Behind": high standards for education, high quality teachers and high quality paraprofessionals as standards for accountability. However he stated that implementation was the problem; that no school could completely comply in the short period of time allotted for implementation. He stated that to attain "universal proficiency" school districts need to look at extending the school year; that schools need to implement pre-school programs and that attaining a full complement of "high quality" teachers and paraprofessionals across the board was a goal that was difficult to attain. He further stated that national testing creates in effect a national curriculum, a point that CWA and others have stated from the beginning.

### **Complexities**

Andy Tompkins of the State School Board stated that although "No Child Left Behind" is a good premise, the details of implementation were decidedly complex. He stated that 95% of Kansas teachers are fully qualified already. He reiterated another problem: with more than 72 languages spoken in Kansas that it would be difficult to get tests in all those languages in the time allotted.

### **No vouchers**

Lisa Elliot of the KNEA said the problem was that there are too many tests already. Interestingly, many of those tests were put in place by implementing Quality Performance Accreditation

and Outcome-based Education, a change in education fully supported by the KNEA when it was implemented. She emphasized the need for total education of the child...the "relationship" part of education. She worries that vouchers for schools would become a reality because many schools will not measure up to the standards prescribed by "No Child Left Behind."

### **Destroying education?**

John Vratil (R), state senator and member of the Senate Education Committee emphasized the need for "local control" in education, that 100% proficiency was not an attainable goal. He wondered if "No Child Left Behind" was a way to destroy public education.

### **Some thoughts and questions of my own:**

I wondered as I sat and listened to all of the panelists talk about federal mandates and not getting enough money from the Feds to implement them; that it costs some states more money to implement the new programs than they are getting from the federal government. Apparently some states have opted to do that since government funding is a small part of the state education funding pie. I began to wonder if they were objecting to the federal government telling them what to do, or if they wanted the money without accountability. In questioning about how much OBE and QPA is costing the state in administrative costs as well as student and teacher time spent, no one seems to know how much money is being spent. Several legislators have asked and have gotten no answers. That is on the state level...now we are talking about federal dollars which also come out of our pockets. When was the last time someone gave you a lot of money to spend on a project and required no accountability from you?

### **Local control when it suits them**

I also wondered about the "local control" aspect. As I recall, during the debate over teaching "naturalistic" science versus teaching children all theories of origins, local control was not an option. In fact, they did not think that local school boards were smart enough to decide how to teach origins in their own communities. Rather, they would prefer to rely upon a biased view of origins that promote an unproven theory. They were perfectly happy dictating national science standards, dictating curriculum and squelching any opposition at the state level. Now local control is a good idea?

### **Public school monopoly**

Allowing parents to spend their tax dollars on alternative schooling for their children if they are not satisfied with a "failing" or inadequate school is also not an option for the panelists. If one looks at history, monopolies or "top-down" oligarchies tend to become despotic from lack of competition, but that does not enter this equation for change.

Apparently *some* Republicans and Democrats don't like the Act; actually CWA has not been in favor of many of its provisions either. However, our reasons for disliking certain aspects have at least remained consistent.