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# Parental Rights in Education — Constant Vigilance Needed

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Who makes the crucial decisions about the education of your children? The rights of parents to make these essential decisions must be asserted and defended in every generation. There are others who would wish to make those decisions concerning your children.

Jeff Jacoby of *The Boston Globe* begins a recent column with these words, drawn from a national party platform:

*“Freedom of education, being an essential of civil and religious liberty . . . must not be interfered with under any pretext whatever. . . . We are opposed to state interference with parental rights and rights of conscience in the education of children as an infringement of the fundamental . . . doctrine that the largest individual liberty consistent with the rights of others insures the highest type of American citizenship and the best government.”*

Those impressive words are taken from a resolution adopted by the 1892 Democratic National Convention. Can you imagine the Democratic Party adopting similar language today? Not hardly.

In the years since 1892, teacher unions have grown in membership and influence, now representing one of the most powerful political forces in Washington and state capitals. The teacher unions and the educational establishment continually press for more government control of education and against innovations such as charter schools. Both national parties are, at least in part, captive to the educational establishment. The teacher unions are one of the most powerful forces within the Democratic Party, but the educational bureaucracies also hold at least some sway over Republicans. President Ronald Reagan ran for office in 1980 calling for the abolition of the U.S. Department of Education. Nevertheless, even after the so-called “Reagan Revolution,” the department grew larger than ever.

With reference to the 2008 race for the presidency, Jacoby notes:

*Today, on education as on so much else, the Democrats sing from a different hymnal. When the party’s presidential candidates debated at Dartmouth College recently, they were asked about a controversial incident in Lexington, Mass., where a second-grade teacher, to the dismay of several parents, had read her young students a story celebrating same-sex marriage. Were the candidates “comfortable” with that?*

*“Yes, absolutely,” former senator John Edwards promptly replied. “I want my children . . . to be exposed to all the information . . . even in second grade . . . because I don’t want to impose my view. Nobody made me God. I don’t get to decide on behalf of my family or my children. . . . I don’t get to impose on them what it is that I believe is right.” None of the other candidates disagreed, even though most of them say they oppose same-sex marriage.*

Then:

*Thus in a little over 100 years, the Democratic Party - and much of the Republican Party - has been transformed from a champion of “parental rights and rights of conscience in the education of children” to a party whose leaders believe that parents “don’t get to impose” their views and values on what their kids are taught in school. Do American parents see anything wrong with that? Apparently not: The majority of them dutifully enroll their children in government-operated*

*schools, where the only views and values permitted are the ones prescribed by the state.*

As Jacoby rightly observes, no one would want government to control 90% of housing or 90% of entertainment, but the government does control 90% of primary and secondary education. Furthermore, most parents seem unconcerned about this.

Jacoby responds:

*But we should be concerned. Not just because the quality of government schooling is so often poor or its costs so high. Not just because public schools are constantly roiled by political storms. Not just because schools backed by the power of the state are not accountable to parents and can ride roughshod over their concerns. And not just because the public-school monopoly, like most monopolies, resists change, innovation, and excellence.*

In several states, forces including the teacher unions are pushing for universal preschool programs reaching down as young as 3-year-olds. Most of the candidates running for the Democratic presidential nomination are fully supportive of these proposals. The government will, if allowed, extend its reach and control into younger and younger ages — and will include additional millions and millions of children.

Parents do have choices, and parental choice in education is a necessary precondition for a free society. Beyond this, parents bear a responsibility before God to make wise and responsible decisions concerning the education of their children. Indeed, parents cannot evade this responsibility.

Jeff Jacoby's column is a timely reminder of the fact that the rights of parents must be protected in every generation. Otherwise, other forces with other agendas will run roughshod over the convictions and worldviews of parents. It is happening all around us even now.

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READ ON: Evidence of the governmental subversion of parental rights over children in public schools comes just last night as a Maine school district voted to provide contraceptives to students ages 11-13 in a Portland-area middle school — without parental notification. As *The Associated Press* reported late on Wednesday:

*Pupils at a city middle school will be able to get birth control pills and patches at their student health center after the local school board approved the proposal Wednesday evening.*

*The plan, offered by city health officials, makes King Middle School the first middle school in Maine to make a full range of contraception available to students in grades 6 through 8, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services.*

Further:

*At King Middle School, birth control prescriptions will be given after a student undergoes a physical exam by a physician or nurse practitioner, said Lisa Belanger, who oversees Portland's student health centers.*

*Students treated at the centers must first get written parental permission, but under state law such treatment is confidential, and students decide for themselves whether to tell their parents about the services they receive.*

