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## Rotten to the core

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It's one of the few things most liberals, moderates and conservatives are agreeing on: Common Core is a terrible idea.

The national K-12 education initiative – promoted by the Obama administration to replace a hodgepodge of state standards with a single set of learning goals – is designed to supplant the much-maligned No Child Left Behind Act.

But critics from all points on the political spectrum share similar Common Core concerns: It undermines student individuality and teacher autonomy; puts too much emphasis on standardized tests; and sets the stage for a federal takeover of education.

Isn't such a federal takeover illegal? Yes. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act forbids the feds from meddling in school curriculum development.

But the federal government, as it does too often, found a loophole. A state that agrees to adopt Common Core curriculum increases its likelihood of winning a piece of the more than \$4 billion in education grants under Obama's Race to the Top initiative.

Georgia's opposition stalled this legislative term when anti-Common Core legislation backed by Rep. Tom Ligon, R-Brunswick, failed to pass the House Education Committee in the General Assembly. Similar bills in South Carolina and Mississippi also have failed.

That's a shame, because Common Core is not the silver-bullet solution for educationally "underperforming" states that some people think.

People in the 45 states that quickly adopted all or parts of Common Core are seeing that. Bipartisan backlash in some states has been so fierce that the curriculum had to be rebranded as something else. Florida, for example, now calls Common Core the "Next Generation Sunshine State Standards"; Arizona refers to its program as the "Arizona College and Career Ready Standards."

Common Core proponents – money-hungry education bureaucrats, big-business lobbyists and establishment-entrenched politicians from both parties – have tried to discredit critics. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan's condescension dripped like condensation last year when he characterized opponents as mostly "white suburban moms" who discovered "all of a sudden, their child isn't as brilliant as they thought they were and their school isn't quite as good as they thought."

On the contrary – some of Common Core’s most cogent criticism comes from scholars at leading think tanks from the left *and* right, including the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution, the Brookings Institution and the Cato Institute.

Many Common Core complainants are veteran teachers. If you asked your average teacher, you’d probably get this request first: Just stop tweaking education standards every three or four years.

Many educators are critical of Common Core’s overcomplicated processes to solve simple math problems (70 percent of third- to eighth-grade students failed the math test in New York, an early Common Core adopter). Teachers say areas of study are too rigorous for younger students; first-graders are taught about ancient civilizations, for example.

And some lessons are too esoteric; one special-education teacher told a national media outlet that one of her students’ tasks was to draw a picture of the word “nobody.”

Educators and parents have long complained that schools focus too much on “teaching to the test.” Is a newer and more meticulous version of that strategy really the solution?

Not all Common Core opponents are against holding students to a national yardstick. Those have been around for years – the SAT, Advanced Placement tests, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and others.

What they’re opposed to is implementing an untested, top-down set of standards created behind closed doors. It’s like introducing a prescription drug on the market without testing it for dangerous side effects.

Experts are opposed to voluminous data collection that could violate student privacy. They’re opposed to a plan that moves children, regardless of their talents and goals, together in lockstep like mass-produced widgets.

And they’re opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach. Shouldn’t Georgia students be taught to Georgia standards, as opposed to California’s, Louisiana’s or Idaho’s?

Yet, our federal government seems to be implying that it has it all figured out for us.

Georgia isn’t totally immersed in Common Core. The state doesn’t use the national test that assesses Common Core standards, which is developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

Georgia opted out of PARCC testing last July. Why? The state realized the cost of PARCC for math and language arts exceeded the Georgia Department of Education’s *entire* annual testing budget.

That touches on yet another reason to oppose Common Core. What’s all this going to cost participating states? By one estimate, the price of new books, new equipment and additional

teacher training skyrockets over the first seven years into the billions of dollars – likely more than states would get in promised Race to the Top cash.

Education is and always should be a state's right. When states stop sitting up and begging for federal block grants such as Race to the Top – and when the feds stop using them as carrots to push a back-door national curriculum – then states can win back their autonomy protected by the Constitution.

The longer this goes on, the more quickly Americans will realize that Common Core is to education what Obamacare is to health care.