



Common Core Issue Highlights Huge Role of Federal Government in Education

By Dr. Susan Berry

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A positive byproduct of having the Common Core Standards in the political spotlight is that Americans are now learning of the enormous role the federal government has had in education for nearly 50 years, from President Lyndon Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, to President Barack Obama's decision in 2009 to use federal "Race to the Top" funds to lure states into adopting nationalized standards.

In Mississippi, longtime U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran (R), who not only supported his state's adoption of the Common Core standards, but also voted in 1979 to help President Jimmy Carter establish the U.S. Department of Education, is engulfed in a contentious primary battle with State Sen. Chris McDaniel (R), who fought to rid his state of the controversial standards.

Last Monday, Mississippi Commissioner of Higher Education Hank Bounds criticized McDaniel, based on a comment McDaniel made in April about Common Core. Bounds said, "I am deeply concerned by the comment that not only should the U.S. Dept. of Education be abolished, but federal dollars should not flow to the states, because the word 'education' is not in the Constitution."

"The word 'education' is not in the Constitution. Because the word is not in the Constitution, it's none of their business," McDaniel said. "The Department of Education is not constitutional."

Bounds said McDaniel's position could affect \$2 billion in federal dollars for elementary and secondary education, should he be elected.

Similarly, Mississippi Board of Education chairman Dr. Wayne Gann issued a letter expressing his concern about McDaniel's "support for abolishing the U.S. Department of Education and eliminating nearly \$800 million in federal funding from our Mississippi schools."

“The nearly \$800 million in federal funds Mississippi receives accounts for 24 percent of the state’s overall education budget,” Gann wrote in what appears to be an attempt to cast McDaniel as a candidate who doesn’t want children to get the best education. “Can you imagine how devastating this would be for the children of this state to not receive the money they need?”

In response to these criticisms, McDaniel responded:

No one was proposing a cut in that... It was a statement we were discussing about Common Core. We were speaking specifically about Race to the Top funds. And what I said is that those funds shouldn't be contingent upon those states adopting Common Core. Common Core has no business being in our schools, so I was saying, “don't spend that federal money as a result of accepting something we find objectionable.” I wasn't saying, “cut off all federal aid and federal funding.” I was saying, ‘the Race to the Top program and the Common Core is problematic.’”

McDaniel’s comment zeroes in on one of the main problems with the U.S. Department of Education – the fact that funding funneled to states comes with “strings” attached.

Emmett McGroarty, education director at the American Principles Project, agrees with McDaniel.

“The U.S. Department of Education is not necessary to make a mere transfer of money from the federal government to a state,” McGroarty told Breitbart News.

He continued:

What the Department bureaucracy does enable is conditional funding and waivers. The Department provides money or, as with *Race to the Top*, the possibility of money to a state in return for obedience to the federal government’s policy whims. And now, as with the *No Child Left Behind* waivers, the Department is offering regulatory flexibility - that is substituting one set of burdensome regulatory requirements for another set - in exchange for the state’s obedience to the federal government.

McGroarty points out that, until the federal government started passing money to state departments of education, these state departments had a minor role. In fact, it’s likely many of the state education bureaucrats who are promoting Common Core can thank the federal government for grants that provide them with jobs.

“Another problem with conditional funding is that the state education bureaucracy tends to act as advocates for the federal policies and view legislators and citizens with paternalism and hostility,” McGroarty explains. “This weakens a state’s system of checks and balances and undermines citizen-directed government.”

“The elimination of the U.S. Department of Education and the prohibition of conditional funding and waivers would mean that the citizens of a state could truly make their own decisions about education policy and spend all their money as they see fit—whether that money came from state taxes or the federal government,” he said.

Neal McCluskey, associate director of Cato's Center for Educational Freedom, agrees with McGroarty, and then observes the results of decades-long interference in education by the federal government.

“The U.S. Department of Education is unconstitutional – the Constitution only gives Washington specific, enumerated powers, and authority over education is not among them – but it also has a decades-long record of failure,” he told Breitbart News. “Test scores have been stagnant throughout its lifetime, while spending has skyrocketed. Its oodles of higher education dollars mainly translate into rampant tuition inflation and waste.”

“And it doesn't create new money,” McCluskey asserts. “It takes it from taxpayers, burns a bunch off in bureaucracy, then offers the remainder back with politicized, stultifying rules attached.”

The issue of the Common Core standards in the U.S. Senate primary race in Mississippi has raised a small-scale version of the conversation Americans are ready to have about the role of the federal government in education.