

NEA's Obama endorsement comes as union's influence wavers

By [Matthew Boyle](#) - The Daily Caller 8:24 AM 07/06/2011

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The National Education Association's (NEA) early endorsement of President Barack Obama's 2012 re-election bid has sparked speculation about what motivated the nation's biggest teachers' union.

Some experts speculate the premature endorsement may be a sign that the NEA is terrified. The union has just witnessed a slew of school choice victories and experts surmised it could be a confirmation of the union's increasingly weak political position across the country. ([THE TWEET BEAT: White House uses Twitter to get aggressive with critics](#))

Sarah Longwell of the Center for Union Facts told The Daily Caller the union normally would've forced a candidate to give into more demands before handing out an endorsement. But, faced with what Longwell describes as a "losing PR battle," the NEA needed national help now.

"They could have held out and won some concessions from the administration, which has been, admittedly a little hard on teachers' unions," Longwell said, adding that Education Secretary Arne Duncan hasn't "seen eye to eye" with the unions on lots of policies.

"Right now, they [teachers' unions] are so under attack from Republican governors across the country that they feel like they need the [Obama] administration now more than ever."

Longwell points specifically to the NEA caving on its adamant opposition of teacher evaluations based on students' performance. Longwell said the union now agrees to support the idea, even though it won't agree to any existing evaluation metrics.

"That to me was the crazy thing. That was the huge break," Longwell said of how the NEA now agrees to support student-performance-based teacher evaluations. "They have never said anything like that before."

Cato Institute education policy expert Neal McCluskey thinks the NEA may be hoping for political favors from Duncan if and when he starts handing out waivers from No Child Left Behind regulations. Duncan said recently that he'd consider waivers for certain parts of the program if it doesn't receive full funding soon, but wouldn't give any specifics as to how the Department of Education would go about giving them out.

"My take is that they're trying to get behind Obama early, get on his good side, and then hope Secretary Duncan comes out and issues waivers from No Child Left Behind that are connected to things that they like," McCluskey said, adding that it's a possibility too that the timing of NEA's endorsement might be simply because of its scheduled meeting.

McCluskey also said "I do think that this signifies a much-weakened National Education Association largely because the Obama administration tends to agree with a lot of Republicans that the unions are generally a problem."

At the meeting, the NEA also voted to increase its dues by \$10 per member. Given that the NEA has 3.2 million members, that's \$32 million extra the union will be pulling in. They can't spend it on a specific candidate's campaign, such as Obama's, but they can target issues and

ballot initiatives with the cash.

[According to Ed Week](#), NEA plans to spend 60 percent of the new funds on its “Ballot Measure/Legislative Crisis Fund” and the other 40 percent on national and state media campaigns.

A major battle teachers’ unions are losing nationwide, as a [Tuesday Wall Street Journal editorial](#) details, is the fight over school choice. The WSJ writes that at least 13 states have enacted school choice legislation this year and 28 states have pending legislation in the works.

American Principles in Action’s Emmett McGroarty told TheDC that the NEA’s campaign shows how desperate the union is and how it’s on the losing end of a national fight.

“I think that they [the NEA] are buying into his [Obama’s] agenda of centralizing education,” McGroarty said. “The gist of what he’s trying to do is push the national standards across the country and, with that, national assessments. Assessments and standards are tools of control.”

Longwell adds that she thinks it’s odd that the NEA would endorse Obama without even knowing who his Republican opponent will be. She thinks it’s yet another sign that the teachers’ unions are running scared.

“You know that old saying, ‘When you’re getting run out town, try to get in front and make it look like a parade?’” Longwell said. “I think that’s what they [the NEA] are doing. I think that so many people have gotten hip to the idea that they [the NEA] are in so many ways culpable for many of the problems plaguing public education.”

The NEA did not respond to TheDC’s requests for comment.

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