



'Broken' spending in education

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An advocate for educational freedom says two bills introduced to the U.S. House to significantly cut the role of federal government in K-12 public schools and move forward with revamping No Child Left Behind are pointless.

The bills would significantly scale back the federal role in K-12 education, allowing districts to determine their own standards, curriculum, and tests. However, because they would still have to report testing results to the feds, Neal McCluskey of the [Cato Institute](#) says the measures are pointless.

"Because who knows what the data means? It's basically just continuing No Child Left Behind, only slightly less rigid, but still ... trying to give this inaccurate impression that the federal government can demand meaningful transparency, and it can't," he contends.

The most disappointing aspect, in McCluskey's opinion, is that there is no call for meaningfully cutting federal spending on education. "There is no excuse from a logical or policy perspective for not cutting federal spending in education, but this GOP bill shows no courage whatsoever in that regard," he notes.

While McCluskey maintains there is overwhelming proof that the federal government wastes almost every dollar it puts into elementary and secondary education, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper (D) faces a bit of a different dilemma as he prepares to appeal a court ruling that says his state is underfunding its public schools by billions of dollars. ([Listen to audio report](#))

A Denver district judge has ruled the state is underfunding K-12 schools by \$3 billion. To fill the gap, taxes would have to be raised 50 percent, or almost 90 percent of the general budget would have to go toward education. Ben DeGrow of the Denver-based [Independence Institute](#) says this is an overreach by the judge.

"First of all, this is a decision that belongs to our elected representatives and the legislature to decide how much resources are dedicated to education," he notes. "But this claim that education is so drastically underfunded just goes to show that the way we spend money on schools is broken."

In *Lavto vs. Colorado*, the plaintiffs contend schools in rural areas are not getting a fair portion of the funding. But DeGrow says that is up for debate. "Making this into an issue that all schools in Colorado are underfunded and that the way to fix the problem is through a remedy from the courts is just wrong-headed," he contends.

The legislature has appropriated \$3.5 million for the case, and DeGrow expects it to eventually be decided by the state Supreme Court.