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Beware the U.S. Education Department SWAT team

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By: [Brian W. Walsh](#) 06/14/11 8:05 PM

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OpEd Contributor

Add the U.S. Department of Education to the list of federal agencies that can invade your home at gunpoint and hold you and your family in custody for hours.

Kenneth Wright learned this the hard way last week, when federal "education" agents busted down the front door of his Stockton, Calif., home at 6 in the morning.

"They surrounded the house; it was like a task force or SWAT team," a neighbor told a national news affiliate. "They all had guns. They dragged him out in his boxer shorts, threw him to the ground and handcuffed him."

Wright's terrified children -- ages 3, 9 and 11 -- were forced to sit in a patrol car for two hours. Wright himself was in custody for six hours. "I felt really bad for those kids," a neighbor said.

Federal agents for the Education Department's inspector general executed a very broad search warrant and seized paperwork and a personal computer. Wright says the law enforcement agents -- who reportedly included 13 with the Education Department and one or two Stockton police officers -- told him they were investigating his estranged wife's use of federal aid for students. But she doesn't even live in his house.

A federal spokesman tried to distance the Education Department from the raid by emphasizing that the IG runs a "semi-independent office." But that begs the question of why a federal agency overseeing education policy should have an IG who can send agents armed with guns into Americans' homes. Or why the department has SWAT-style teams of agents to begin with.

In yet another Orwellian development, the Education Department IG provides an anonymous tip line encouraging Americans to inform on each other. This is reminiscent of the Obama White House asking Americans in 2010 to report on friends and neighbors who said anything "fishy" about Obamacare in private conversations.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center says that it trains agents for "over 80 federal agencies." These include the Secret Service, Bureau of Prisons, and similar agencies that one would expect.

But the list includes dozens of federal agencies with no business training and fielding armed officers. Who wants early-morning armed break-ins by the Department of Agriculture, Railroad Retirement Board, Bureau of Land Management, Tennessee Valley Authority, Office of Personnel Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

If these agencies occasionally have a legitimate need for force to execute a warrant, they should be required to call a real law enforcement agency, one that has a better sense of perspective. The FBI, for example, can draw upon its vast experience to determine whether there is an actual need for a dozen SWAT agents.

Too many federal agencies with overlapping jurisdictions and authorizing statutes are intent on "solving" problems through criminal investigation, prosecution and punishment.

And too many of those same agencies have the ability to create criminal liability through regulations. A 6 a.m. raid could happen to anyone whom the federal government targets.

The use of SWAT teams is part of a troubling national trend. Peter Kraska, in a Cato Institute report, estimates that SWAT teams now make 40,000 raids on citizens each year. Paramilitary raids by out-of-control federal agencies against ordinary citizens, who may not have violated any law, are a growing threat to our safety.

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The fact that the Department of Education conducted a SWAT-style raid should outrage. Giving the federal government too many laws, too many regulations and too many armed agents is a formula for disaster for our individual rights and freedom.

Brian W. Walsh is a senior research fellow in the Heritage Foundation's Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.

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