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## Upon further review, don't merge the Education and Labor departments

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“Let President Trump reorganize the government like a business.”

That’s a quote, from someone named Michelle in Delaware, in one of the latter, glossy, inspirationally illustrated pages of the government reorganization proposal put forth by the Trump administration on Thursday, a proposal that leads off with a merger of the departments of Education and Labor. Thinking purely about diminishing Washington’s unconstitutional, counterproductive influence in education, I was slightly encouraged when I first considered the proposal. It wouldn’t kill a single program (and it’s the programs that really matter) but at least it would get rid of a Cabinet-level education secretary, basically a permanent White House lobbyist for “doing more” in education.

After a day’s extra thought, I’m even less supportive. Indeed, you can probably put me in the “no” column, as much as I’d like to see the department and secretary go away. Aside from the fact that nothing the department actually *does* would go away, I have developed an even bigger concern: We cannot trade in education and labor secretaries for a new workforce czar, and that appears to be either the goal of creating a Department of Education and the Workforce, or at least its likely outcome. And it’s tied to this idea that everything should be run “like a business.”

If you read the pages explaining the proposal to do the DEW, the rationale seems centered on creating human cogs to plug into a giant economic machine, and to do so with lots of federal direction.

“The new merged department would ... allow the Administration to more effectively address the full range of issues affecting American students and workers,” it reads. The DEW would “centralize and better coordinate Federal efforts to train the American workforce.”

Yikes.

Don’t get me wrong: I think enabling people to be productive, successful parts of the economy is a good thing. But this begins to smell distinctly of top-down workforce engineering, which just from an economic standpoint is very dangerous; bureaucrats in Washington will never know how many chemists, accountants, or janitors we will need in 10 or 20 years, where we will need

them, or how to provide the right incentives to get the right people into the right jobs. Life and the world are far too complex for that.

Perhaps even more important (and here we are joined by some of our progressive friends) education is about much more than just employment prep. It is also, for most or even all people, about learning about art and how society works and moral values and countless other important matters that go far beyond preparing you to fill open job slots and earn a comfy salary. It is about nothing less than developing full *human beings*.

Of course, public schooling (aka centralized government schooling) is ripe for social and economic engineering. Indeed, much of its local and state development was driven by that, and attempting to coordinate from D.C. — to organize education “like a business” in which government controls all the inputs — is hardly a characteristic just of Trump. Since the first President George Bush and the National Education Goals, administrations have toiled to create controlling, nationalized education policy, a drive that reached its apogee with President Barack Obama and Common Core, state-centralized databases, and dictates about teacher evaluations.

The way to escape centralized engineering through education is, of course, to decentralize education — empower families to freely choose schools embracing myriad values and focuses and allow educators to freely create such institutions. Deciding what people teach and learn must be *voluntary*, and public schooling, even at local and state levels, is inherently not.

But we don’t have to go as far as getting school choice for all to deal with the matter at hand: the federal role in education. Federal intrusion simply needs to end, and this proposal, while presenting a tempting sliver of hope by technically ending the Department of Education, would not do that. Indeed, it might make the federal role even worse by creating, essentially, a new department of industrial labor policy.

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