



Mackinac Center for Public Policy is neither independent nor unbiased (letter)

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By Robert Sacksteder

The Kalamazoo Gazette is one of the primary sources many people use in this area to make decisions about public education. We hope we are receiving unbiased information.

Two sources the newspaper often cites are the Michigan Education Association and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Reporters and opinion writers in the Gazette often belittle the MEA for presenting data that supports funding for education and defending the status quo. Most people know that Michigan public school employees fund the MEA which, consequently, is unlikely to cite data that supports paying school employees less or developing policies which will put their donors at risk of dismissal.

On the other hand, the Gazette often presents the Mackinac Center for Public Policy as an "independent" or "libertarian" think tank. Independent suggests unbiased and open to receiving raw data and reaching conclusions that do not promote a particular bias or goal. Libertarian suggests liberty or individual rights. The connotations the Gazette writers use to describe the Mackinac Center seem positive and in the public's best interest. Unfortunately, such tags are misleading.

Some facts about the Mackinac Center many help readers. The Mackinac Center spokespeople have said they will not disclose their contributors; however, a little research reveals an extensive list of donors. For example, The Devos, Prince, Koch and Dow families, all associated with the conservative wing of the Republican Party, have contributed. Other major donors include the Rodney Fund, the Herrick Fund and Dunn's Foundation for Right Thinking. In recent years, the Rodney Fund has donated to the following groups: Mackinac Center for Public Policy \$1,061,478; Cato Institute \$527,815; Leadership Institute \$136,000; Ludwig von Mises Institute for Austrian Economics \$117,431; and National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation \$116,000.

According to the Economic Research Institute, the Herrick Foundation has consistently donated to the Mackinac Center and the Cato Institute, conservative organizations that support the Republican Party. They also opposed union activities at their business. Perhaps not by coincidence, the Mackinac Center not only is harshly critical of the MEA and public education but it also opposes unions.

Dunn's Foundation for the Development of Right Thinking speaks for itself. Right refers to the conservative, right-wing

way of thinking. In addition, Dunns Foundation publishes a pledge that it asks supporters to take. It reads: "I proclaim publicly that I favor ending government involvement in education." The Dunns Foundation gave more than \$500,000 to the Mackinac Center between 2002-2006. Should we think they are giving this money to the Mackinac Center because it is an unbiased think tank looking for creative ways to improve the education of students enrolled in K-12 public education in Michigan?

Frankly, if we eliminate government involvement in education, we end public education.

Given the donor list, shouldn't the Gazette state and the public know that The Mackinac Center for Public Policy has and probably will continue to advocate for reducing funding for and possibly eliminating public education?

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