

## White House Seeks To Tamp Schools Speech Furor

by LARRY ABRAMSON



Enlarge

Gerald Herbert/AP

President Obama's planned speech Tuesday to the nation's schoolchildren is being criticized by many conservatives and parents.

Obama also takes credit for trying to raise standards and boost education funding, which irks commentator Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute.

### 'This Sounds Very Political'

Citing one section where Obama says he's "working hard to fix up your classrooms and get you the books, equipment and computers you need to learn," McCluskey says, "This sounds very political. This is about 'I, President Obama, doing these things for you.'"

Regardless of the speech's actual message, McCluskey has a bigger problem with the way it was packaged. The Department of Education initially distributed a lesson plan urging teachers to discuss with students how they could help the president. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said Sunday that the plan was harmless but the wording has been modified.

"It was talking about helping the president hit his goal of having the highest percent of college graduates by 2020," Duncan said on CBS' Face the Nation. "We just clarified that to say, 'Write a letter about your own goals and what you're going to do to achieve those goals.'"

That change mollified few critics, however.

### Bypassing School Boards

Barbara Cargill of the Texas State Board of Education said the White House can't change the way news of the speech was sent out: through an e-mail sent straight to school districts, bypassing state and local school boards.

She says she works hard to scrutinize textbooks and give parents access to lesson plans, and that Obama's address circumvents that process.

The White House hopes to ease those concerns by releasing the speech in advance. And Duncan emphasized that the event is voluntary.

"Schools can do this, they can not do this, they can watch it during the school day, children can watch it at home with their families, they could watch it a month from now," Duncan said. "They could never watch it. It's purely voluntary."

But even that step made things worse for some school systems because no matter what they choose to do, some parents will be upset. Cargill says parents don't like the choice they face, either. "If they opt their children out, they're going to feel ostracized," she says. "They're going to have to leave the comfort of their classroom to be dismissed to a gym."

### Refusing To Let Children Listen

In Texas, the Pearland Independent School District outside Houston says it can't broadcast the speech live to all classrooms. Teachers are free to show the speech afterward, and parents can refuse to allow their children to hear the speech.

One father, Brett Curtis, says he's so upset that he plans to keep his children home from school Tuesday

September 7, 2009

text size **A A A**

The White House tried Monday to calm a storm of criticism over a speech that President Obama plans to deliver to the nation's schoolchildren by [publicizing the remarks](#) a day in advance.

The early release was meant to reassure many parents and conservatives who called it a political intrusion into the school day.

In the speech, Obama urges children to study hard, a message they hear daily from teachers, parents and celebrities. The president cites by name several students who have overcome adversity, including himself. He says he grew up poor but succeeded, thanks to hard work and a dedicated mother. He

to send the district a message.

"To let the school board know that I expect them to take responsibility for the curriculum and the content of what they are going to be putting into our schools," Curtis says.

The White House has made education a top priority and has boosted federal funding for schools. Now Obama's speech may be deepening the divide over the proper role of the federal government in education.

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**R D Harmony (homebuilding)** wrote:

Most Recommended Jennifer B...

I'll add only A FEW ALLCAPS INSERTED words:

""""The Republicans' position under (HISTORIC ELECTORAL CONTROVERSY) Bush:  
Dissenting from the President is unpatriotic.

The Republicans' position now (UNABIGUOUS ELECTION RESULTS): Listening to the  
President is unpatriotic.""""

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 12:20:04 PM

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**Duane M (dmengo)** wrote:

I'm neither a Democrat nor a Republican. Neither political party represents any of my interests. His speech is very dry and boring in my opinion. President Obama isn't saying anything new or different. I'm kind of disappointed to be honest.

President Obama essentially says you can be successful if you apply yourself and work hard, yet he fails to mention that not all schools are equal in this country. I myself grew up poor and attended one of the worst high schools in my home state and had to struggle to achieve two college degrees.

Obama himself attended Punahou School, a private college preparatory school in Hawaii from the fifth grade until he graduated from high school. Now he sends his own children to some of the most expensive private schools in the country. What does he really know about the challenges that poor students face today in public school?

In my opinion the President's speech on education is amateurish and rather disappointing.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 12:11:31 PM

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**Thanh Lim (tlim)** wrote:

It's amusing that here in the US, for a lot of people, the expectation is just to graduate from high school.

You ask Chinese/Indian what their expected, and it is that the bare minimum is to graduate from a good university with at least a bachelor's.

Notice how an incredibly high percentage of Asians are over at UC Berkeley and UCLA? The writing's on the wall unless expectations.

And right now, high school is good enough for most parents. Their kids get stuck in a dead end job and all they can do is scream about the evils of socialism.

Just a sad state of affairs.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 12:05:32 PM

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**Reina Amano (Amano)** wrote:

I'm an overseas English learner.

My comment may be way off the mark, but let me say reading both the article and comments help me understand not only English but also the United States.

I think Mr.Obama is supported generally all over the world and in my country, too. I hope his words won't be distorted.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 12:00:01 PM

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**elaina banda (makechange)** wrote:

It is difficult to comprehend that as a bright, advanced nation and how we've struggled historically to rid this country with as much ignorance that still surrounding this speech it prevails today. After, hearing on the news and radio the comments and implications made surrounding this speech I'm disappointed in the people of this nation. How can we hold ourselves to a higher level, to a civilized way when you hear the various accusations against our current President?

As a future teacher, I was most disgusted with the various parents removing their children from school today. They do not agree with the President on a political level of some sort; therefore, they must punish their child and the school. Please explain to me how in any way taking your child out of school today is going to "show them". Who is this them? What secretive, political agenda is President Obama pushing?

I'm sorry, is there something wrong with the message get an education or that in order to even compete and survive in the 21st century you will need an education. As an individual you will need to set goals, no matter what those goals are, but you set them and you accomplish them. What's the hurt in asking today's youth to participate or asking them to voice their own concerns to the President? Should we not take their opinions into account? They're the one's sitting in there NCLB classrooms filled with 40 other peers. These students are our future. They will be voting in a few years. It is important that someone reach out and encourage them to seek a better future. This tactic of speaking to students is not new, Reagan and Bush both delivered speeches to students. Why the uproar now that a Democratic President utilizes the same tactic? Oh, right it's because he's Democrat. Forget the great message or the connection and involvement from the White House down to today's youth. All that matters is these words ring true from a Democrat. This is not socialism or communism, and people need to stop waving those words around without any understanding of a socialist or communist society/government entails.

Since, we have the freedom of speech we are forced to take the good with the bad, the educated with the ignorant. Unfortunately, these ideals and beliefs will continue to trickle into the further generations leaving us to tread the uphill battle.

We finally have a President that is not drilling us with the belief of fear, but instead with the belief in ourselves.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:56:00 AM

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**UJ walsh (Justdoit)** wrote:

What comes around goes around!.....remember the "BUSH DERANGEMENT SYDROME"

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:50:24 AM

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**Teresa B (BSomebody)** wrote:

I'm out. Off to watch the address. No matter what you believe. Please love your children and give them a break from political hyperbole long enough to let them be kids. They will forget this before the weekend.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:41:58 AM

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**David Perkins (sir\_dave)** wrote:



The president wants to give a nonpolitical message about studying hard and staying in school and people are incensed.

The White House then pre-releases the entire speech to quell the ignorant that claim it's a "political intrusion", which, like the healthcare plan, is intended to dispel any false information put out there by the massive corporate-republican misinformation campaign.

Lesson Learned: never underestimate the stupidity and gullibility of the American electorate.  
Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:40:24 AM

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**Paul Orr (mytquinn)** wrote:

There are people here saying some truly mind-numbingly paranoid things about this speech in particular and about Obama in general.

I don't have a problem necessarily with the president making a speech about school and responsibility. But the issue is much larger than this.

Those worried about socialism already have their kids in one of the biggest socialist constructs this great country of ours has seen. I mean school.

Think about it: A compulsory institution which has the power of the police to round up kids who skip school and even arrest their parents. An institution that is now, under Arne Duncan and Mr. Obama, ready to begin national standards and more testing, and tells us again and again that its job is to 'indoctrinate' (my word, not theirs) all children by training them to be 'Future Workers' (their words!) in the global economy, plugging away in a cubicle for their country. All children are to learn the same facts at the same time or risk, along with their teachers, punishment if they are unable to keep up.

What on Earth does that say to you...? The conveyer belt, factory schooling we have had for the last 140 or so years has nothing to do with real education as it has been known for thousands of years.

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:38:18 AM

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**L.A. Stone (moonlight\_poet)** wrote:

Such paranoia and misinformation (again) coming from the Right. Sadly school children are not of voting age thus they can be easily manipulated by their parents and/or other adults of authority. Then again, children of today are much more SMARTER & SAVVY than you think!  
;-)

Tuesday, September 08, 2009 11:36:50 AM

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