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Obama's school speech - social indoctrination?

Pete Chagnon - OneNewsNow - 9/3/2009 6:00:00 AM

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Is the president using his bully pulpit to push social change in America's schools?



Neal McClusky with the [Cato Institute's](#) Center for Educational Freedom believes the Obama administration is engaging in outright indoctrination of school children. He says that on September 8, Obama will address schools nationwide -- and in conjunction with that speech, school teachers have been sent study packets and a letter from the Department of Education, complete with assignments and questions to ask their students.

"The letter says that 'no other task is more critical to our economic future and our social progress than what these schools do.' Now that alone is a little disturbing because it suggests that the schools are supposed to be pushing social change," McClusky notes.

Some of the suggested discussion questions teachers are to ask students include: "Does the speech make you want to do anything?" and "Are we able to do what the president is asking of us?" Calls to the Department of Education in order ascertain the topic of the speech have not been returned. (*See editor's note below*)

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Apart from the discussion questions, the Department of Education has sent out a "menu of classroom activities." McClusky says those activities include reading books on President Obama and participating in the Department of Education's "I Am What I Learn" video contest, and discussing "why it is important that we listen to the president and other elected officials."

"And so this appears to be very much something intended to make kids talk about how important the presidency is and apparently how inspirational this president is," McClusky points out. "And it could also be about using the schools as tools of social change."



McClusky

McClusky calls the event "unprecedented." He adds that the Constitution lays out explicit powers for the federal government and education is not among them. "So the federal government has been really unconstitutionally involved in education for the last 40-some years," McClusky says.

He adds that in that time there has been a shift to a more centralized control of education in the implementation of No Child Left Behind, The Race to the Top Fund --

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which includes \$350 million to develop a national test and force states to adopt national standards.

According to McClusky, the real danger in all of this is that conservatives, who at first did not believe the federal government should be involved, are the ones who are now pushing for the change. He hopes this educational speech and discussion will serve as a wakeup call.

McClusky adds that it is antithetical to a free society to have schools run by a centralized government.



Editor's Note (9/3/2009, 11:00 AM): ABC News reports that the White House is revising some of the language in the teacher materials. Students had been asked to "Write letters to themselves about what they can do to help the president." The Department of Education has changed that section to now read: "Write letters to themselves about how they can achieve their short-term and long-term education goals."

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